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LONDON:

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A COMEDY OF MASKS

A NOVEL

BY
ERNEST DOWSON
AND
ARTHUR MOORE

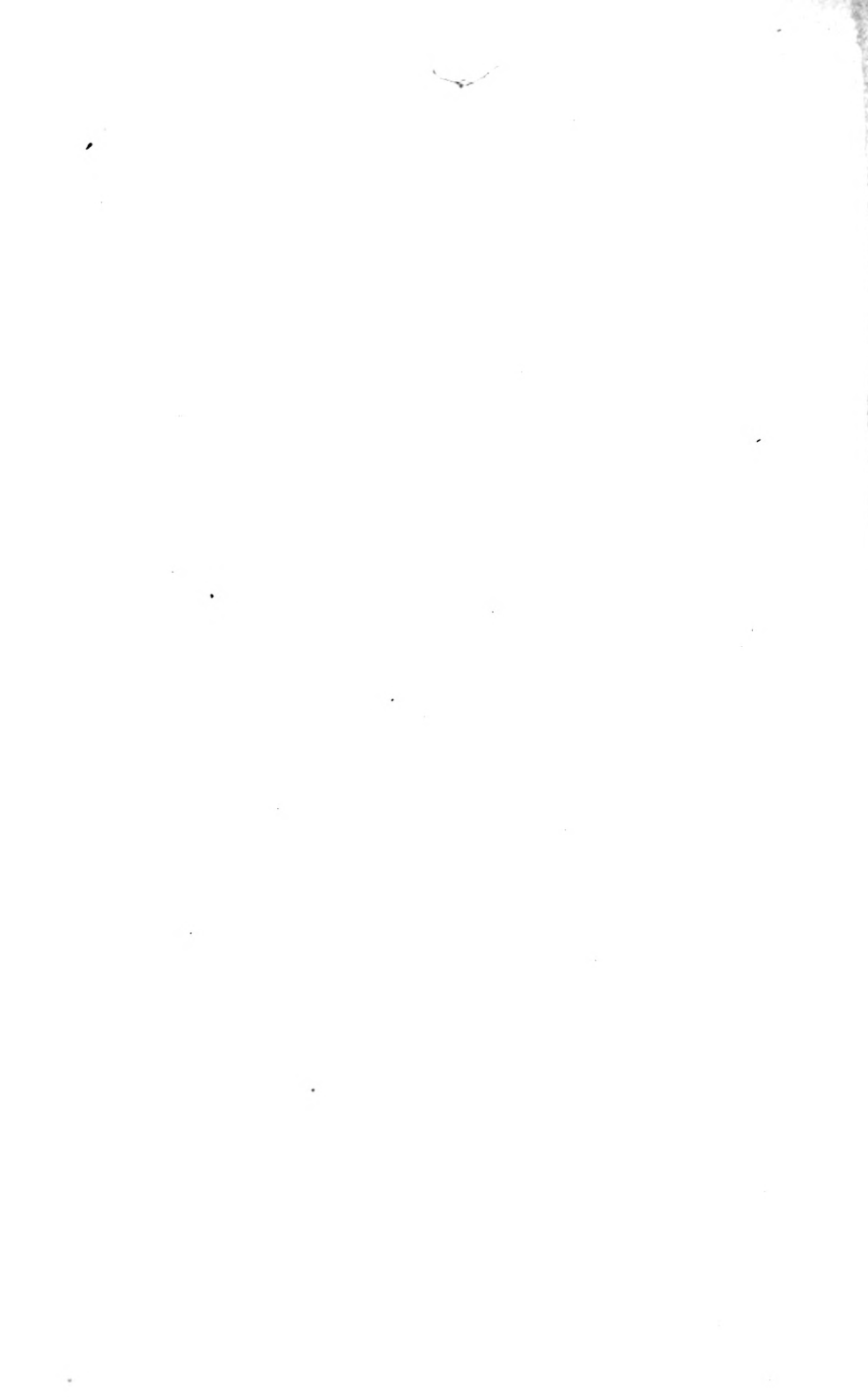
IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1893

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A COMEDY OF MASKS

CHAPTER I.

IN that intricate and obscure locality which stretches between the Tower and Poplar, a tarry region, scarcely suspected by the majority of Londoners, to whom the 'Port of London' is an expression purely geographical, there is, or was not many years ago, to be found a certain dry-dock called Blackpool, but better known from time immemorial to skippers and longshoremen, and all who go down to the sea in ships, as 'Rainham's Dock.'

Many years ago, in the days of the first Rainham and of wooden ships, it had been

no doubt a flourishing ship-yard ; and, indeed, models of wooden leviathans of the period, which had been turned out, not a few, in those palmy days, were still dusty ornaments of its somewhat antique office. But as time went on and the age of iron intervened, and the advance on the Clyde and the Tyne had made Thames ship-building a thing of the past, Blackpool Dock had ceased to be of commercial importance. No more ships were built there, and fewer ships put in to be overhauled and painted ; while even these were for the most part of a class viewed at Lloyd's with scant favour, which seemed, like the yard itself, to have fallen somewhat behind the day. The original Rainham had not bequeathed his energy along with his hoards to his descendants ; and, indeed, the last of these, Philip Rainham, a man of weak health, whose tastes, although these were veiled in obscurity, were supposed to trench little upon shipping, let the business jog along so much

after its own fashion that the popular view hinted at its imminent dissolution. A dignified, scarcely prosperous quiet seemed the normal air of Blackpool Dock, so that even when it was busiest, and work still came in, almost by tradition, with a certain steadiness—when the hammers of the riveters and the shipwrights awoke the echoes from sunrise to sunset, with a ferocious regularity which the present proprietor could almost deplore, there was still a suggestion of mildewed antiquity about it all that was, at least to the nostrils of the outsider, not unpleasing. And when the ships were painted, and had departed, it resumed very easily its more regular aspect of picturesque dilapidation. For in spite of its sordid surroundings and its occasional lapses into bustle, Blackpool Dock, as Rainham would sometimes remind himself, when its commercial motive was pressed upon him too forcibly, was deeply permeated by the spirit of the picturesque.

Certainly Mr. Richard Lightmark, a

young artist, in whose work some excellent judges were beginning already to discern, if not the hand of the master, at least a touch remarkably happy, was inclined to plume himself on having discovered, in his search after originality, the artistic points of a dockyard.

It was on his first visit to Rainham, whom he had met abroad some years before, and with whom he had contracted an alliance that promised to be permanent, that Lightmark had decided his study should certainly be the river. Rainham had a set of rooms in the house of his foreman—an eighteenth-century house, full of carved oak mantels and curious alcoves, a ramshackle structure within the dock-gates, with a quaint balcony staircase, like the approach to a Swiss chalet, leading down into the yard. In London these apartments were his sole domicile ; though, to his friends, none of whom lived nearer to him than Bloomsbury, this seemed a piece of conduct too flagrantly eccentric—

on a parity with his explanation of it, alleging necessity of living on the spot : an explanation somewhat droll, in the face of his constant lengthy absences, during the whole of the winter, when he handed the reins of government to his manager, and took care of a diseased lung in a warmer climate. To Lightmark, however, dining with his friend for the first time on chops burnt barbarously and an inferior pudding, residence even in a less salubrious quarter than Blackpool would have been amply justified, in view of the many charming effects—for the most part coldly sad and white—which the river offered, towards evening, from the window of his friend's dining-room.

After his first visit, he availed himself eagerly of Rainham's invitation to make his property the point of view from which he could most conveniently transfer to canvas his impressions ; and he worked hard for months, with an industry that came upon his friend as a surprise, at the

uneven outlines of the Thames warehouses, and the sharp-pointed masts that rose so trenchantly above them. He had generated a habit of coming and going, as he pleased, without consideration of his host's absences ; and latterly, in the early spring—whose caprices in England Rainham was never in a hurry to encounter—the easel and painting tools of the assiduous artist had become an almost constant feature of the landscape.

Now, towards the close of an exceptionally brilliant day in the finish of May, he was putting the last touches to a picture which had occupied him for some months, and which he hoped to have completed for Rainham's return. As he stood on the wharf, which ran down to the river-side, leaning back against a crane of ancient pattern, and viewing his easel from a few yards' distance critically, he could not contemplate the result without a certain complacency.

‘It's deuced good, after all,’ he said to

himself, with his head poised a little on one side. 'Yes, old Rainham will like this. And, by Jove! what matters a good deal more, the hangers will like it, and if it's sold—and, confound it! it must be sold—it will be a case of three figures.'

He had one hand in his pocket, and instinctively—it may have been the result of his meditation—he fell to jingling some coins in it. They were not very many, but just then, though he was a young gentleman keenly alive to the advantages of a full purse, their paucity hardly troubled him. He felt, for the nonce, assured of his facility, and doubtless had a vista of unlimited commissions and the world at his feet, for he drew himself up to his full height of six feet and looked out beyond the easel with a smile that had no longer its origin in the fruition of the artist. Indeed, as he stood there, in his light, lax dress and the fulness of his youth, he had (his art apart) excuse for self-complacency. He was very pleasant to look upon, with

an air of having always been popular with his fellows and the favourite of women ; this, too, was borne out by his history. Not a beautiful man, by any means, but the best type of English comeliness : ruddy-coloured, straight, and healthy ; muscular, but without a suggestion of brutality. His yellow moustache, a shade lighter than his hair—which, although he wore it cropped, showed a tendency to be curling—concealed a mouth that was his only questionable feature. It was not the sensitive mouth of the through and through artist, and the lines of it were vacillating. The lips, had they not been hidden, would have surprised by their fulness, contradicting, in some part, the curious coldness of his light blue eyes. All said, however, he remained a singularly handsome fellow ; and the slight consciousness which he occasionally betrayed that his personality was pleasing hardly detracted from it ; it was, after all, a harmless vanity that his friends could afford to overlook. Just then his thoughts,

which had wandered many leagues from the warehouses of Blackpool, were brought up sharply by the noise of an approaching footstep. He started slightly, but a moment later greeted the new-comer with a pleasant smile of recognition. It was Rainham's foreman and general manager, with whom the artist, as with most persons with whom he was often in contact, was on excellent, and even familiar, terms.

'Look here, Bullen,' he said, twisting the easel round a little, 'the picture is practically finished. A few more strokes—I shall do them at home—and it is ready for the Academy. How do you like it?'

Mr. Bullen bent down his burly form and honoured the little canvas with a respectful scrutiny.

'That is Trinidad Wharf, sir, I suppose?' he suggested, pointing with a huge forefinger at the background a little uncertainly.

'That is Trinidad Wharf, Bullen, cer-

tainly! And those masts are from the ships in the Commercial Docks. But the river, the atmosphere—that's the point—how do they strike you?'

'Well, it's beautiful, sir,' remarked Bullen cordially; 'painted like the life, you may say. But isn't it just a little smudgy, sir?'

'That's the beauty of it, Bullen. It's impressionism, you Philistine!—a sort of modified impressionism, you know, to suit the hangers. 'Gad, Bullen, you ought to be a hanger yourself! Bullen, my dear man, if it wasn't that you *do* know how to paint a ship's side, I would even go so far as to say that you have all the qualifications of an Academician.'

'Ah, if it comes to that, Mr. Lightmark, I dare say I could put them up to some dodges. I am a judge of "composition."'

'Composition? The devil you are! Ah, you mean that infernal compound which they cover ships' bottoms with? What an atrocious pun!' The man looked

puzzled. 'Bullen, R.A., great at composition; it sounds well,' continued Lightmark gaily, just touching in the brown sail of a barge.

'I've a nephew in the Royal Artillery, sir,' said Mr. Bullen; 'but I fear he is a bad lot.'

'Oh, they all are!' said Lightmark, 'an abandoned crew.'

His eyes wandered off to the bridge over which the road ran, dividing the dry-dock from the outer basin and wharf on which they stood. A bevy of factory girls in extensive hats stuck with brilliant Whitechapel feathers were passing; one of them, who was pretty, caught Lightmark's eyes and flung him a saucy compliment, which he returned with light badinage in kind that made the foreman grin.

'They know a fine man when they see one, as well as my lady,' he said. Then he added, as if by an after-thought, lowering his voice a little: 'By the way, Mr.

Lightmark, there was a young lady—a young person here yesterday—making inquiries.’

Lightmark bent down, frowning a little at a fly which had entangled itself on his palette.

‘Yes?’ he remarked tentatively, when the offender had been removed.

‘It was a young lady come after someone, who, she said, had been here lately: a Mr. Dighton or Crichton was the name, I think. It was the dockman she asked.’

‘Nobody comes here of that name that I know of,’ said Lightmark.

‘Not to my knowledge,’ said Bullen.

‘Curious!’ remarked Lightmark gravely.

‘Very, sir!’ said Bullen, with equal gravity.

Lightmark looked up abruptly: the two men’s eyes met, and they both laughed, the artist a little nervously.

‘What did you tell her, Bullen?’

‘No such person known here, sir. I

sent her away as wise as she came. I hold with minding my own business, and asking no questions.'

'An excellent maxim, Bullen!' said Lightmark, preparing to pack up his easel. 'I have long believed you to be a man of discretion. Well, I must even be moving.'

'You know the governor is back, sir?'

Lightmark dropped the paint-brush he was cleaning, with a movement of genuine surprise.

'I never knew it,' he said; 'I will run up and have a yarn with him. I thought he wasn't expected till to-morrow at the earliest?'

'Nor he was, Mr. Lightmark. But he travelled right through from Italy, and got to London late last night. He slept at the Great Eastern, and I went up to him in the City this morning. He hasn't been here more than half an hour.'

'Nobody told me,' said Lightmark. 'Gad! I am glad. I will take him up

the picture. Will you carry the other traps into the house, Bullen ?'

He packed them up, and then stood a trifle irresolutely, his hand feeling over the coins in his pocket. Presently he produced two of them, a sovereign and a shilling.

'By the way, Bullen!' he said, 'there is a little function common in your trade, the gift of a new hat. It costs a guinea, I am told; though judging from the general appearance of longshoremen, the result seems a little inadequate. Bullen, we are pretty old friends now, and I expect I shall not be down here so often just at present. Allow me—to give you a new hat.'

The foreman's huge fist closed on the artist's slender one.

'Thank you, sir! You are such a facetious gentleman. You may depend upon me.'

'I do,' said Lightmark, with a sudden lapse into seriousness, and frowning a little.

If something had cast a shadow over the artist for the moment, he must have had a faculty of quick recovery, for there was certainly no shade of constraint upon his handsome face when a minute later he made his way up the balcony steps and into the office labelled 'Private,' and, depositing his canvas upon the floor, treated his friend to a prolonged handshaking.

'My dear Dick!' said Rainham, 'this is a pleasant surprise. I had not the remotest notion you were here.'

'I thought you were at Bordighera, till Bullen told me of your arrival ten minutes ago,' said Lightmark, with a frank laugh. 'And how well——'

Rainham held up his hand—a very white, nervous hand, with one ring of quaint pattern on the forefinger—deprecatingly.

'My dear fellow, I know exactly what you are going to say. Don't be conventional—don't say it. I have a fraudulent countenance if I do look well; and I

don't, and I am not. I am as bad as I ever was.'

'Well, come now, Rainham, at any rate you are no worse.'

'Oh, I am no worse!' admitted the dry-dock proprietor. 'But, then, I could not afford to be much worse. However, my health is a subject which palls on me after a time. Tell me about yourself.'

He looked up with a smile, in which an onlooker might have detected a spark of malice, as though Rainham were aware that his suggested topic was not without attraction to his friend. He was a slight man of middle height, and of no apparent distinction, and his face, with all its petulant lines of lassitude and ill-health—the wear and tear of forty years having done with him the work of fifty—struck one who saw Philip Rainham for the first time by nothing so much as by its ugliness. And yet few persons who knew him would have hesitated to allow to his nervous, suffering visage a certain indefinable charm. The

large head set on a figure markedly ungraceful, on which the clothes seldom fitted, was shapely and refined, although the features were indefensible, even grotesque. And his mouth, with its constrained thin lips and the acrid lines about it, was unmistakably a strong one. His deep-set eyes, moreover, of a dark gray colour, gleamed from under his thick eyebrows with a pleasant directness ; while his smile, which some people called cynical, as his habit of speech most certainly was, was found by others extraordinarily sympathetic.

‘ Yes, tell me about yourself, Dick,’ he said again.

‘ I have done a picture, if that is what you mean, besides some portraits ; I have worked down here like a galley-slave for the last three months.’

‘ And is the queer little *estaminet* in Soho still in evidence ? Do the men of to-morrow still meet there nightly and weigh the claims of the men of to-day ?’

Lightmark smiled a trifle absently ; his eyes had wandered off to his picture in the corner.

‘Oh, I believe so!’ he said at last ; ‘I dine there occasionally when I have time. But I have been going out a good deal lately, and I hardly ever do have time. . . . May I smoke, by the way?’

Rainham nodded gently, and the artist pulled out his case and started a fragrant cigarette.

‘You see, Rainham,’ he continued, sending a blue ring sailing across the room, ‘I am not so young as I was last year, and I have seen a good deal more of the world.’

‘I see, Dick,’ said Rainham. ‘Well, go on!’

‘I mean,’ he explained, ‘that those men who meet at Brodonowski’s are very good fellows, and deuced clever, and all that ; but I doubt if they are the sort of men it is well to get too much mixed up with. They are rather *outré*, you know ; though,

of course, they are awfully good fellows in their way.'

'Precisely!' said Rainham, 'you are becoming a very Solomon, Dick!'

He sat playing idly with the ring on his forefinger, watching the artist's smoke with the same curiously obscure smile. It had the effect on Lightmark now, as Rainham's smile did on many people, however innocent it might be of satiric intention, of infusing his next remarks with the accent of apology.

'You see, Rainham, one has to think of what will help one on, as well as what one likes. There is a man I have come to know lately—a very good man too, a barrister—who is always dinning that into me. He has introduced me to some very useful people, and is always urging me not to commit myself. And Brodonowski's is rather committal, you know. However, we must dine there together again one day, soon, and then you will understand it.'

'Oh, I understand it, Dick!' said Rain-

ham. 'But let me see the picture while the light lasts.'

'Oh yes!' cried Lightmark eagerly. 'We must not forget the picture.' He hoisted it up to a suitable light, and Rainham stood by the bow-window, from which one almost obtained the point of view which the artist had chosen, regarding it in a critical silence.

'What do you call it?' he asked at last.

"The Gray River," said Lightmark; then a little impatiently: 'But how do you find it? Are you waiting for a tripod?'

'I don't think I shall tell you. By falling into personal criticism, unless one is either dishonest or trivial, one runs the risk of losing a friend.'

'Oh, nonsense, man! It's not such a daub as that. I will risk your candour.'

Rainham shrugged his shoulder.

'If you will have it, Dick—only, don't think that I am to be coaxed into compliments.'

‘*Is it bad?*’ asked Lightmark sceptically.

‘On the contrary, it is surprisingly good. It’s clever, and pretty: sure to be hung, sure to sell. Only you have come down a peg. The sentiment about that river is very pretty, and that mist is eminently pictorial; but it’s not the river you would have painted last year; and that mist—I have seen it in a good many pictures now—is a mist that one can’t quite believe in. It’s the art that pays, but it’s not the art you talked at Brodonowski’s last summer, that is all.’

Lightmark tugged at his moustache a little ruefully. Rainham had an idea that his ups and downs were tremendous. His mind was a mountainous country, and if he had elations, he had also depressions as acute. Yet his elasticity was enormous, and he could throw off troublesome intruders, in the shape of memories or regrets, with the ease of a slow-worm casting its skin. And so now his confidence was only shaken for a moment, and

he was able to reply gaily to Rainham's last thrust :

‘ My dear fellow, I expect I talked a good deal of trash last year, after all ’—a statement which the other did not find it worth while to deny.

They had resumed their places at the table, and Lightmark, with a half-sheet of notepaper before him, was dashing off profiles. They were all the same—the head of a girl: a childish face with a straight, small nose, and rough hair gathered up high above her head in a plain knot. Rainham, leaning over, watched him with an amused smile.

‘ The current infatuation, Dick, or the last but one ? ’

‘ No,’ he said ; ‘ only a girl I know. Awfully pretty, isn't she ? ’

Rainham, who was a little short-sighted, took up the paper carelessly. He dropped it after a minute with a slight start.

‘ I think I know her,’ he said. ‘ You

have a knack of catching faces. Is it Miss Sylvester?’

‘Yes; it is Eve Sylvester,’ said Lightmark. ‘Do you know them? I see a good deal of them now.’

‘I have known them a good many years,’ said Rainham.

‘They have never spoken of you to me,’ said Lightmark.

‘No? I dare say not. Why should they?’ He was silent for a moment, looking thoughtfully at his ring. Then he said abruptly: ‘I think I know now who your friend the barrister is, Dick. I recognise the style. It is Charles Sylvester, is it not?’

‘You are a wizard,’ answered the other, laughing. ‘Yes, it is.’ Then he asked: ‘Don’t you think she is awfully pretty?’

‘Miss Sylvester? . . . Very likely; she was a very pretty child. You know, she had not come out last year. Are you going?’

Lightmark had pulled out his watch absently, and he leapt up as he discovered the lateness of the hour.

‘Heavens, yes! I am dining out, and I shall barely have time to dress. I will fetch my traps to-morrow; then we might dine together afterwards.’

‘As you like,’ said the elder man. ‘I have no engagements yet.’

Lightmark left him with a genial nod, and a moment later Rainham saw him through the window passing with long, impetuous strides across the bridge. Then he returned to his desk, and wrote a letter or two until the light failed, when he pushed his chair back, and sat, pen in hand, looking meditatively, vaguely, at the antiquated maps upon the walls.

Presently his eye fell on Lightmark’s derelict paper, with its scribble of a girl’s head. He considered it thoughtfully for some time, starting a little, and covering it with his blotting-paper, when Mrs. Bullen, his housekeeper, entered with a

cup of tea—a freak of his nerves which made him smile when she had gone.

Even then he left his tea for a long time, cooling and untasted, while he sat lethargically lolling back, and regarding from time to time the pencilled profile with his sad eyes.

CHAPTER II.

THE period of Lightmark's boyhood had not been an altogether happy one. His earliest recollections carried him back to a time when he lived a wandering, desolate life with his father and mother, in an endless series of Continental hotels and *pensions*. He was prepared to assert, with confidence, that his mother had been a very beautiful person, who carried an air of the most abundant affection for him on the numerous occasions when she received her friends. Of his father, who had, as far as possible, ignored his existence, he remembered very little.

During these years there had been frequent difficulties, the nature of which he

had since learnt entirely to comprehend ; controversies with white-waistcoated proprietors of hotels and voluble tradespeople, generally followed by a severance of hastily-cemented friendships, and a departure of apparently unpremeditated abruptness.

When his mother died, he was sent to a fairly good school in England, where his father occasionally visited him, and where he had been terribly bullied at first, and had afterwards learned to bully in turn. He spent his holidays in London, at the house of his grandmother—an excellent old lady, who petted and scolded him almost simultaneously, who talked mysteriously about his ‘poor dear father,’ and took care that he went to church regularly, and had dancing-lessons three times a week.

His father’s death, which occurred at Monaco somewhat unexpectedly, and on the subject of which his grandmother maintained a certain reserve, affected the

boy but little ; in fact, the first real grief which he could remember to have experienced was when the old lady herself died—he was then nineteen years old—leaving him her blessing and a sum of Consols sufficient to produce an income of about £250 a year.

The boy's inclinations leaned in the direction of Oxford, and in this he was supported by his only-surviving relative, his uncle, Colonel Lightmark, a loud-voiced cavalry officer, who had been the terror of Richard's juvenile existence, and who, as executor of the old lady's will, was fully aware of the position in which her death had left him, and her desire that he should go into the Church.

At one of the less fashionable colleges, which he selected because he was enamoured of its picturesque inner quadrangle, and of the quaint Dutch glass in the chapel windows, Lightmark was popular with his peers, and, for his first term, in tolerably good odour with the dons, who

decided, on his coming up to matriculate, that he ought to read for honours. And he did read for honours, after a fashion, for nearly a scholastic year; after which an unfortunate excursion to Abingdon, and a boisterous re-entry into the University precincts, at the latter part of which the junior proctor and his satellites were painfully conspicuous, ended in his being 'sent down' for a term. Whereupon he decided to travel, a decision prompted as much by a not unnatural desire to avoid avuncular criticism as by a constitutional yearning for the sunny South. Besides, one could live for next to nothing abroad.

During the next few years his proceedings were wrapped in a veil of mystery which he never entirely threw aside. Rainham, it is true, saw him occasionally at this time; for, indeed, it was soon after his first arrival in Paris that Lightmark made his friend's acquaintance, sealed by their subsequent journey together to Rome. But Rainham was discreet. Light-

mark before long informed his uncle, with whom he at first communicated through the post on the subject of dividends, that he was studying Art, to which his uncle had replied :

‘Don’t be a d——d fool. Come back and take your degree.’

This letter Dick had light-heartedly ignored, and he received his next cheque from his uncle’s solicitors, together with a polite request that he would keep them informed as to his wanderings, and an intimation that his uncle found it more convenient to make them the channel of correspondence for the future.

At Paris it was generally conceded that, for an Englishman, the delicacy of Lightmark’s touch, and the daring of his conception and execution, were really marvellous ; and if only he could draw ! But he was too impatient for the end to spend the necessary time in perfecting the means.

At Rome he tried his hand at sculpture, and made a few sketches which his at-

tractive personality rather than their intrinsic merit enabled him to sell. The *camaraderie* of the Café Greco welcomed him with open arms; and he was to be encountered, in the season, at the most fashionable studio tea-parties and diplomatic dances. Before long his talent in the direction of seizing likenesses secured him a well-paid post as caricaturist-in-chief on the staff of a Republican journal of more wit than discretion; and it was in this capacity that he gained his literary experience. On the eve of the suppression of this enterprising organ the Minister of Police thought it a favourable opportunity to express to Lightmark privately his opinion that he was not likely to find the atmosphere of Rome particularly salubrious during the next few months. Whereupon our friend had shrugged his shoulders, and after ironically thanking the official for his disinterested advice, he had given a farewell banquet of great splendour at the Grecco, packed up palettes and paint-

boxes, and started for London, where his friends persuaded him that his talent would be recognised. And at London he had arrived, travelling by ruinously easy stages, and breaking the journey at Florence, where he sketched and smoked pipes innumerable on the Lung Arno ; at Venice, where he affected cigarettes, and indulged in a desperate flirtation with a pretty black-eyed marchesa ; at Monaco, where he gambled ; and at Paris, where he spent his winnings, and foregathered with his friends of the Quartier Latin.

His empty pockets suggested the immediate necessity for work in a manner more emphatic than agreeable. His uncle, upon whom he called at his club, invited him to dinner, lectured him with considerable eloquence, and practically declined to have any more to do with the young reprobate ; which shook Lightmark's faith in the teaching of parables.

However, he set to work in the two little rooms beneath the tiles which he rented in

Bloomsbury, and which served him as bedroom and studio; and for a few weeks he finished sketches by day, and wrote sonnets for magazines, and frivolous articles for dailies, by night. And, strange to say, though there were times when success seemed very hard to grasp, and when he was obliged to forestall quarter-day, and even to borrow money from Rainham—when that bird of passage was within reach—he sold sketches from time to time; he obtained commissions for portraits; and the editors occasionally read and retained his contributions.

In course of time he moved further west, to the then unfashionable neighbourhood of Holland Park, and devoted his energies to the production of a work which should make an impression at the Academy. It was his first large picture in oils, an anonymous portrait, treated with all the audacity and *chic* of the modern French school, of a fair-haired girl in a quaint fancy dress, standing under the soft light of Japanese

lanterns, in a conservatory, with a background of masses of flowers.

And when it was finished, Rainham and the small coterie of artists who were intimate with Lightmark were generously enthusiastic in their expressions of approval.

‘But I don’t know about the Academy, old man,’ said one of these critics dubiously, after the first spontaneous outburst of discussion. ‘Of course it’s good enough, but it’s not exactly their style, you know. The old buffers on the Hanging Committee wouldn’t understand it——’

And though Lightmark maintained his intention in the face of this criticism, the picture was never submitted to the hangers. Rainham brought a wealthy American shipowner to see it, and when the committee sat in judgment, the work was already on the high seas on its way to New York.

After all, Lightmark owed his nascent reputation to work of a less important nature—a few landscapes, which appeared

on the walls of Bond Street galleries and were transferred in course of time to fashionable drawing-rooms ; a few portraits, which the uninitiated thought admirable because they were so 'like.' Moreover, he could flatter discreetly, and he took care not to bore his sitter ; two admirable qualities in a portrait-painter who desires to succeed.

CHAPTER III.

IT was to one of his sitters that Lightmark owed his introduction to the Sylvesters. Charles Sylvester had been told that Lightmark was a man who would certainly achieve greatness, and he felt that here was an opportunity to add a hitherto missing leaf to his laurels, by constituting himself a patron of art, a position not often attained by young barristers even when, as in Sylvester's case, they have already designs upon a snug constituency.

Sylvester began by giving his *protégé* a commission to paint his mother's portrait, and before this work was finished a very appreciable degree of intimacy had sprung up between the Sylvester family and the

young painter, who found no difficulty in gratifying a woman-of-the-world's passion for small-talk and fashionable intelligence—judiciously culled from the columns of the daily newspapers with the art of a practised wielder of the scissors and paste-brush.

With Miss Sylvester he had a less easy task. She was a girl who had from a very early age been accustomed to have her impressions moulded by her self-assertive elder brother; and he, at any rate at first, had been careful to show that he regarded Lightmark as an object of his patronage rather than as a friend who could meet him on his own exalted level. He had been known, in his earlier years, to speak somewhat contemptuously of 'artists'; and, indeed, his want of sympathy with Bohemians in general had given Eve occasion for much wondering mental comment, when her brother first spoke of introducing the portrait-painter to the family circle.

However, brotherly rule over a girl's opinions is apt to be disestablished when

she draws near the autumn of her teens ; and after her emancipation from the school-room and short frocks, Miss Eve began to think it was time that she should be allowed to entertain and express views of her own. And after her first ball, an occasion on which her programme had speedily been besieged, and the *débutante* marked as dangerous by the observant mothers of marriageable sons and daughters —after this important function, even Charles had begun to regard his pretty sister with a certain amount of deference. He certainly had reason to congratulate himself on having so attractive a young person to pour out his coffee and compose his ‘buttonholes’ before he started for chambers in the morning. Eve was at an age when the wild-rose tints of a complexion fostered by judicious walks and schoolroom teas had not yet yielded to the baneful influence of late dinners and the other orgies which society conducts in an unduly heated atmosphere. Her figure

was still almost childishly slim, but graceful, and straight enough to defy criticism in the ball-room or the saddle. Her eyes were gray, with a curious, starry expression in their depths, which always suggested that the smile which was so often on her lips was quite ready to exaggerate the dimples in her cheeks. Her hair was refractory, from her own point of view ; but Lightmark found the tangled brown masses, which she wore gathered into a loose knot high at the back of her shapely head, entirely charming, and suggestive, in a way, of one of Lancret's wood nymphs.

She could never bring herself to believe that her nose was pretty, although in the seclusion of her chamber she had frankly criticised her reflected image ; and perhaps it *was* a trifle too small for most critics. Still, her admirers declared that, especially in profile, it was delightfully piquant, and vastly preferable to the uninteresting aquilines which adorned the countenances of her mother and brother. A provoking,

childish, charming face, when all was said : it was not wonderful that Lightmark would fain put it upon canvas. And, indeed, so far as the young girl herself was concerned, he had already a conditional promise. She had no objection whatever to make, provided that Charles was first consulted ; only she had no dress that would meet the occasion. And when Lightmark protested that the airy white garment, with here and there a suggestion of cream-coloured lace and sulphur ribbons, which she was wearing, was entirely right, she scouted the idea with scorn.

‘ This old frock, Mr. Lightmark,’ she exclaimed, with a pretty display of disdain for his taste, ‘ why, I’ve worn the old thing for months ! No ; if Charles says I may have my portrait painted, I shall go straight off to Madame Sophie, and then you may paint me and send me to the Academy or Grosvenor in all my glory.’

Lightmark had found it quite useless to protest, well as he knew that the ordinary

French milliner can be warranted to succeed in producing a garment almost as unpaintable as a masculine black frock-coat.

On the afternoon of the day after Rainham's return to the dock, Lightmark was caressing his fair moustache upon the doorstep of the Sylvesters' house, No. 137, Park Street, West, a mansion of unpretending size, glorious in its summer coat of white paint, relieved only by the turquoise-blue tiles which surrounded the window-boxes, and the darker blue of the railings and front-door. He was calling ostensibly for the purpose of inquiring how Charles Sylvester liked the frame which he had selected for the recently-finished portrait; really in order to induce her brother to allow Eve to sit to him. Sounds as of discussion floated down the wide staircase; and when the servant opened the drawing-room door preparatory to announcing him, Lightmark heard—and it startled him—a well-remembered voice upraised in playful protest.

‘No, ’pon my word, Mrs. Sylvester, my young scamp of a nephew hasn’t done you justice, ’pon my soul he hasn’t!’

At first he felt almost inclined to turn tail; though he had long been aware that the Sylvesters were cognisant of his relationship to the somewhat notorious old Colonel, and that they knew him, as everyone did, he had never contemplated the possibility of meeting his uncle there.

And when he had shaken hands in a bewildered manner with Mrs. Sylvester and Eve, he perceived that his uncle was greeting him with an almost paternal cordiality.

‘Why, Dick, my boy, ’pon my soul I haven’t seen you for an age! You mustn’t neglect your gouty old uncle, you know, Dick; when are you going to paint his portrait, in review order, eh? Not until you’ve painted Miss Eve there, I’ll be bound!’

The prodigal nephew needed all his by no means deficient stock of nerve to enable

him to present an unmoved countenance to this unexpected attack of geniality. This, he thought, as he returned the other's greeting with as great a semblance of ease as he could muster—this was the uncle who had declined to recognise him when they met a few months ago, in the broadest daylight, in Pall Mall!

Presently, while he was trying to recover his equanimity by devoting himself to the cult of Eve, he heard the Colonel whisper in a confidential undertone to their hostess:

‘Devilish clever fellow, my nephew, y’know, though perhaps I oughtn’t to say so. Those newspaper beggars think very highly of him—the critics, y’know, and all that; why, ’pon my soul, I was reading something about him only this morning at the club in the what’s-his-name—the *Outcry*. Said he ought to be in the Academy.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Sylvester sympathetically, ‘you are quite right to be proud of him, Colonel Lightmark. Charles thinks he is very clever, and he is *so* pleased with

my portrait. We want him to paint Eve, you know, only—— Oh, do let me give you another cup of tea, Mr. Lightmark! Two lumps of sugar, I think?’

‘Thank you, Mrs. Sylvester. Do you know, I have discovered that we have a mutual friend—that is to say, I found out not long ago, quite by accident, that my very good friend, Philip Rainham, has the pleasure of your acquaintance.’

‘Oh, really!’ said Eve delightedly; ‘do you know Philip—Mr. Rainham? And have you seen him lately? We haven’t heard anything of him for weeks and weeks—not since Christmas, have we, mamma?’

‘Ah!’ answered Lightmark, smiling, and letting his eyes wander over the white expanse of the Colonel’s waistcoat, ‘I don’t wonder at that. You see, he has been nursing himself on the Riviera all the winter, lucky dog! He only came back last night. I saw him at his dock, you know, down the river—such a jolly old

place. I have been sketching there, on and off, nearly all the spring. He lets me make myself quite at home.'

'Take care, Dick, my boy,' said the Colonel sententiously, fixing his black-rimmed eyeglass under the bushy white brow that shaded his right eye; 'don't you let him entice you into that business. Don't pay nowadays! All the shipping goes up North, y'know. The poor old Thames is only used for regattas now, and penny steamers.'

'How very nice for the Thames!' cried Eve. 'Why, there's nothing I like more than regattas! I do so hope we shall go to Henley this year; but houseboats are so expensive, and it's no fun unless you have a houseboat. We had a punt last year, a sort of thing like a long butler's tray, and Charles got into fearful difficulties. You know, it looks so easy to push a punt along with a pole, but the pole has a wicked way of sticking in the mud at critical moments—when they are clearing

the course, for instance. Oh, it was dreadful! Everybody was looking at us, and I felt like one of those horrid people who always get in the way at the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race!

‘Or the Derby dog, by Jove!’ suggested the Colonel.

‘I can sympathize with you fully, Miss Sylvester,’ said his nephew. ‘I shouldn’t like to say how many times in the course of my first summer term at Oxford I found myself sprawling ignominiously in the Cherwell, instead of posing in a picturesque attitude in the stern of my punt. And one looked such a fool going up to college in wet things. But there aren’t many regattas going on in the regions below London Bridge nowadays. It’s not much like Henley or Marlow, though it’s pretty enough in its way at times. You ought to get Rainham to invite you to the dock; you would create an impression on the natives, and of course he would be delighted. He’s got a most amiable house-

keeper, though I don't think she has heard of thin bread-and-butter; and I have discovered that his foreman is a judge of art—a regular Ruskin.'

'And how is poor Philip, Mr. Lightmark?' asked Mrs. Sylvester tentatively. 'You must bring him here very soon, and make him give an account of himself.'

'Oh,' said Lightmark vaguely, 'he's looking pretty fit, though he doesn't like to be told so. I really believe he would be unhappy if he were in robust health. He finds his damaged lung such a good pretext for neglecting the dock; and if it got quite well, half the occupation of his life would be gone.'

Mrs. Sylvester and Eve both protested laughingly against this somewhat heartless view of the case; and after declining an offer of the back seats of the carriage, which was already waiting at the door to take Mrs. Sylvester and her daughter for their antepandial drive in the Park, and expressing their regret that they had not

seen Charles, uncle and nephew took their leave together.

‘Dick, my boy,’ said the Colonel, when they were safely in the street, ‘you must come and dine with me. Not to-night ; I am going to take Lady Dulminster to the French play. Let me have your address, or come and look me up at the club. I’m dev’lish glad you’re getting on so well, my boy, though you were a fool not to stay up at Oxford and take your degree. After all, though, perhaps you aren’t quite the cut for the Church or a fellowship, and—and the Sylvesters are dev’lish good people to know, Dick. Ta, ta ! Don’t forget to come and see me.’

So saying, Dick’s versatile uncle waved his cheroot by way of adieu, and clambered laboriously into a hansom.

‘By Jove !’ said the younger man blankly, ‘what a ridiculous old humbug it is ! And how he used to frighten me in the old days with his confounded cavalry bluster ! I rather think I *will* look him up : and I’ll

dine with him three times a week if he likes. Meanwhile, it's time for me to go and meet old Rainham, and take him round to Brodonowski's. What a ripping sunset !'

And he strolled light-heartedly through Grosvenor Square, the smoke of his cigarette fading away behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Rainham pushed back the door of the dim little restaurant in Turk Street, Soho, he stood a moment, blinking his eyes a little in the sudden change from the bright summer sunshine, before he assured himself that his friend had not yet arrived. Half a dozen men were sitting about smoking or discussing various drinks. The faces of several were familiar to him, but there were none of them whom he knew ; so he took his seat at a table near the door, and ordered a vermuth to occupy him until Lightmark, whose unpunctuality was notorious, should put in an appearance. In the interim his eyes strayed round the establishment, taking stock of

the walls, with their rough decorations, and the *clientèle*, and noting, not without a certain pleasure, that during the six months in which he had been absent neither had suffered much alteration.

Indeed, to Philip Rainham, who had doubtless in his blood the taint of Bohemia, Brodonowski's and the enthusiasm of its guests had a very definite charm. They were almost all of them artists; they were all of them young and ardent; and they had a habit of propounding their views, which were always of the most advanced nature, with a vehemence which to Rainham represented all the disinterestedness of youth. Very often they were exceedingly well worth knowing, though in the majority of cases the world had not found it out. He knew very few of them personally; he had been taken there first by Lightmark, when the latter was fresh from Paris, and had been himself more in touch with them. But he had often sat smoking silently a little outside the main group,

listening, with a deferential air that sat upon his age somewhat oddly, to their audacious propaganda.

In his mind he would sometimes contrast the coterie with certain artistic houses, more socially important, which he had from time to time frequented: where earnest-eyed women in graceful garments—which certainly afforded a rest to the eye—dispensed tea from a *samovar*, and discoursed discreetly of the current Academy and the most recent symptomatic novel.

The delight of a visible, orderly culture permeating their manners and their conversation was a real one, and yet, Rainham reflected, it left one at the last a trifle weary, a little cold. It seemed to him that this restaurant, with its perennial smell of garlic, its discoloured knife-handles, its frequentation of picturesque poverty, possessed actually a horizon that was somewhat less limited.

Indeed, the dingy room, its assemblage apart, had many traces of an artistic

patronage. The rough walls were adorned, in imitation of the familiar Roman haunt, of which this was, so to speak, a colony, with a host of fantastic sketches : rapid silhouettes in charcoal, drawn for illustration or refutation in the heat of some strenuous argument ; caricatures in the same medium, some of them trenchantly like, of the customers as well as of certain artistic celebrities, whose laurels Brodowski's had not approved, varied here and there by an epigram or a doggerel couplet, damning the Philistine.

Rainham smiled as he recognised occasionally the grotesque travesty of a familiar face. Presently his eyes were arrested by a drawing which was new to him, a face of striking ugliness, offering advantages to the caricaturist of which, doubtless, he had not omitted to avail himself. It imposed itself on Rainham for the savage strength which it displayed, and for an element in its hideousness which suggested beauty. He was still absorbed in the study of this

face when Lightmark entered and took his place opposite him with a brief apology for his tardiness. He was dressed well, with a white orchid in his button-hole, and looked prosperous and rosy. Some light badinage on this score from his various acquaintances in the restaurant he parried with a good-humoured nonchalance ; then he betook himself to consideration of the *menu*.

‘I have been calling on your friends the Sylvesters,’ he explained after awhile, ‘and I could not get away before. My uncle was there, by the way. You have heard me speak of him?’

‘Your uncle, who holds such a lax view of the avuncular offices?’

Lightmark smiled a little self-congratulatory smile.

‘Ah, that’s changed. The old boy was deuced friendly—gave me his whole hand instead of two fingers, and asked me to dine with him. I think,’ he went on after a moment, ‘the Sylvesters have been

putting in a good word for me. Or perhaps it was Mrs. Sylvester's portrait which did the job.'

'Ah,' said Rainham, 'you have painted her, have you?'

Their fish occupied them in silence. Lightmark, a trifle flushed from his rapid walk, smiled from time to time absently, as though his thoughts were pleasant ones. The elder man thought he had seldom seen him looking more boyishly handsome. Presently his eyes again caught the head which had so struck his fancy.

'Is that yours, Dick?' he asked.

Lightmark followed the direction of his eyes to the opposite wall.

'I believe it is,' he remarked, with a shade of deprecation in his manner. 'It is Oswyn. Don't you know him?'

'I don't know him,' said the other, sipping his thin Médoc. 'But I think I should like to. What is he?'

'He will be here soon, no doubt, and then you will see for yourself. He is

Oswyn ! I knew him in Paris better than I do now. He was in B——'s studio ; and B—— swore that he had a magnificent genius. He painted a monstrous picture which the Salon wouldn't hang ; but B—— bought it, and hung it in his studio, where it frightened his models into fits. Last year he came to London, where he makes enough, when he is sober, by painting pot-boilers for the dealers, to keep him in absinthe and tobacco, which are apparently his sole sustenance. In the meanwhile he is painting a masterpiece ; at least, so he will tell you. He is a virulent fanatic, whose art is the most monstrous thing imaginable. He is — but talk of the devil——'

He broke off and nodded to a little lean man of ambiguous age, in a strained coat, who entered at this moment with a rapid lurching gait. He sat down immediately opposite them, under Lightmark's presentment, with which Rainham curiously compared him. And it struck him that

there was something in that oddly repulsive figure which Lightmark's superficial crayon had missed. The long, haggard face was there, with its ill-kempt hair and beard; and the lips, which, when they parted in a smile that was too full of irony, revealed the man's uneven, discoloured teeth. Rainham lost sight of his uncouthness in a sense of his extreme power. His eyes, which were restless and extraordinarily brilliant, met Rainham's presently; and the latter was conscious of a certain fascination in their sustained gaze. In spite of the air of savagery which pervaded the man, it was a movement of sympathy which, on the whole, he experienced towards him. And it seemed as if this sentiment were reciprocal, for when the German youth, who was the cupbearer of the establishment, had taken Oswyn's order, and had brought him absinthe in a long glass, he motioned it abruptly to the opposite table. Then he crossed over and accosted Lightmark, whom he had not

hitherto appeared to recognise, with a word of greeting. Lightmark murmured his name and Rainham's, and the strange little man nodded to him not unamiably.

'I must smoke, if you don't mind,' he said, after a moment.

They nodded assent, and he produced tobacco in a screw of newspaper from the pocket of his coat, and began rapidly to make cigarettes. Rainham watched the dexterous movements of his long nervous hands—the colour of old ivory—and found them noticeable.

'You are not an artist, I think,' he suggested after a moment, fixing his curiously intent eyes on Rainham.

'No,' admitted the other, smiling, 'I am afraid I am not. I am only here on sufferance. I am a mender of ships.'

'He is a connoisseur,' put in Lightmark gaily. 'It's an accident that he happens to be connected with shipping—a fortunate one, though, for he owns a most picturesque old shanty in the far East. But actually

he does not know a rudder post from a jibboom.'

'I suppose you have been painting it?' said Oswyn shortly.

Lightmark nodded.

'I have been painting the river from his wharf. The picture is just finished, and on the whole I am pleased with it. You should come in and give it a look, Oswyn, some time. You haven't seen my new studio.'

'I never go west of Regent Street,' said Oswyn brusquely.

Lightmark laughed a little nervously.

'Oswyn doesn't believe in me, you know, Philip,' he explained lightly. 'It is a humiliating thing to have to say, but I may as well say it, to save him the trouble. He is so infernally frank about it, you know. He thinks that I am a humbug, that I don't take my art seriously, and because, when I have painted my picture, I begin to think about the pieces of silver, he is not quite sure that I may not be a

descendant of Judas. And then, worst of all, I have committed the unpardonable sin: I have been hung at Burlington House. Isn't that about it, Oswyn?

The elder man laughed his low, mirthless laugh.

'We understand each other, Dick; but you don't quite do yourself justice—or me. I have an immense respect for your talent. I feel sure you will achieve greatness—in Burlington House.'

'Well, it's a respectable institution,' said the young man soberly.

Oswyn finished his drink at a long, thirsty gulp, watching the young man askance with his impressive eyes. Rainham noticed for the first time that he had a curious trick of smiling with his lips only—or was it of sneering?—while the upper part of his face and his heavy brows frowned.

'By the way, Lightmark,' he observed presently, 'I have to congratulate you on your renown. There is quite a long pane-

gyric on your picture in the *Outcry* this week. Do you know who wrote it ?'

'Damn it, man!' broke out Lightmark, with a vehemence which, to Rainham, seemed uncalled-for, 'how should I know? I haven't seen the rag for an age.'

There was an angry light in his eyes, but it faded immediately.

Oswyn continued apologetically :

'I beg your pardon. It must be very annoying to you to be puffed indiscreetly. But I fancied, you know——'

Lightmark, flushing a little, interrupted him, laying his hand with a quick gesture, that might have contained an appeal in it, on the painter's frayed coat-sleeve.

'Your glass is empty, and we are about ready for our coffee. What will you take?'

Oswyn repeated his order, smiling still a little remotely, as he let the water trickle down from a scientific height to his glass, whipping the crystal green of its contents into a nebulous yellow. Rainham, who had listened to the little passage of arms in

silence, felt troubled, uneasy. The air seemed thunderous, and was heavy with unspoken words. There appeared to be an under-current of understanding between the two painters which was the reverse of sympathetic, and made conversation difficult and volcanic. It caused him to remind himself, a trifle sadly, how little, after all, one knew of even one's nearest friend—and Lightmark, perhaps, occupied to him that relation—how much of the country of his mind remained perpetually undiscovered; and it made him wonder, as he had sometimes wondered before, whether the very open and sunny nature of the young painter, which was so large a part of his charm, had not its concealed shadows—how far, briefly, Lightmark's very frankness might not be a refinement of secretiveness.

If, however, a word here and there, a trait surprised, indefinable, led him on occasion to doubt of his dominant impression of Lightmark's character, these doubts were never of long duration; and he would

dismiss them, barely entertained, even as a sort of disloyalty, to the limbo of still-born fancies. And so now, with his accustomed generosity, he speedily flung himself into the breach, and did his best to drive the conversation into impersonal and presumably safer channels. He touched on the prospects of the Academy, of academic art, and art in general, and by-and-by, as Oswyn rose to the discussion, he became himself interested, and was actuated less by a wish to make conversation than to draw his new friend out. And as the artist leant forward, grew excited, with his white, lean face working into strange contortions—as he shot out his savage paradoxes, expounding the gospel of the new art a trifle thickly now, and rolling and as rapidly smoking perpetual cigarettes, he found him again strangely attractive.

He had flashes of insight, it seemed to Rainham; there was something in his caustic criticism which led him to believe that he could at another time have justified

himself, defended reasonably and sanely a position that was at least tenable.

But the tide of his spleen invariably overtook him, and he abandoned exegesis for tirade. The *bourgeois*, limited scope of the art in vogue—this was the burden of his reiterated rabid attacks; art watered down to suit the public's insipid palate, and he quoted Chamfort furiously: 'Com-bien de sots faut-il pour faire un public?'—the art of simpering prettiness, without root or fruit in life, the art of absolute convention. He ran over a list of successful names with an ever-growing rancour—artistic hacks, the crew of them, the journalists of painting—with a side-glance at Lightmark, who sat pulling his flaxen moustache, looking stiff and nervous—he would hang the lot of them to-morrow if he had his way, for corrupters of taste, or, better still, condemn them to perpetual incarceration in the company of their own daubs. These people—in fine, the mutual admiration society of incompetents—

where was their justification, where would they be in a decade or so? The hangers-on of the fashionable world, caring for their art as a means of success, of acquiring guineas or a baronetcy or a couple of initials, who dropped the little technique they possessed as soon as they had a competency, and foisted their pictures most on people when they had forgotten how to paint. *Pompier*s, *fumistes*, makers of respectable *pommade*—as the painter's potations increased, his English became less fluent, and he was driven back constantly to the dialect of the Paris *ateliers*, which was more familiar to him than his mother-tongue. Ah! how he hated these people and their thread-paper morality, and their sordid conception of art—a prettiness that would sell!

Rainham had heard it all before; it was full of spleen and rancour, unnecessarily violent, and, conceivably, unjust. But what he could not help recognising, in spite of his repulsion, was a certain nobility

and singleness in the man, ruin as he was. Virtue came out of him ; he had the saving quality of genius, and it was a veritable burning passion of perfection which masqueraded in his spleen. His conception of art for the sake of art only might be erroneous, but it was at least exalted ; and the instinct which drove him always for his material directly to life, rejecting nothing as common or unclean—in the violence of his revolt, perhaps dwelling too uniformly on what was fundamentally ugly—might be disputable, but was obviously sincere. The last notion which Rainham took away with him, when they parted late in the evening (Oswyn having suddenly lapsed from the eloquence to the incoherency of drunkenness), was a wish to see more of him. He had given him his card, and he waited until he had seen him place it—after observing it for some moments attentively with lack-lustre eyes—in the security of his waistcoat. And as the two friends walked towards Charing

Cross, Rainham observed that he hoped he would call.

‘He is a disreputable fellow,’ said Lightmark a little sullenly, ‘and an unprofitable acquaintance. You will find it less difficult to persuade him to make you a visit than to finish it.’ At which Rainham had merely shrugged his shoulders, finding his friend, perhaps for the first time, a little *banal*.

CHAPTER V.

A DAY or two later, as Rainham sat in his river-bound office struggling, by way of luncheon, with the most primitive of chops, his eyes, wandering away from a somewhat mechanic scrutiny of the *Shipping Gazette*, fell upon the shifting calendar on the mantelpiece.

The dial noted Thursday ; and he reminded himself that on that day his friend Lady Garnett had a perennial habit of being at home to her intimates, on the list of whom Rainham could acknowledge, without undue vanity, his name occurred high. There was a touch of self-reproach in his added reminder that a week had elapsed since his return, and he had not

already hastened to clasp the excellent old lady's hand. It was an unprecedented postponement and an infringement of a time-honoured habit ; and Rainham had for his habit all the respect of a man who is always indolent and often ill ; though it must be admitted that to his clerks, who viewed the trait complacently, and to the importunate Bullen, who resented it, he seemed to be only regular in his irregularity. He decided that at least this occasion should not be allowed to slip ; a free afternoon would benefit him. He was always rather lavish of those licenses ; and it seemed to him that the tintinnabulation of teacups in Lady Garnett's primrose and gray drawing-room would be a bearable change from the din of a hundred hammers, which had pelted him through the open windows all the morning. They were patching a little wooden barque with copper, and he paused a moment in the yard, leaning on his slim umbrella to admire the brilliant yellow of the renewed

sheets, standing out in vivid blots against the tarnished verdigris of the old. To pass from Blackpool to the West, however, is a tardy process ; and when Rainham reached the spruce little house in one of the most select of the discreet and uniform streets which adjoin Portman Square, he found the clatter of teacups for the most part over. There were, in fact, only two persons in the long room, which, with its open Erard, and its innumerable *bibelots*, and its plenitude of quaint, impossible chairs, seemed quite cosily exiguous. An old lady with a beautiful, refined face and a wealth of white hair, which was still charming to look at, sat in an attitude full of comfortable indolence, with a small pug in her lap, who bounced at Rainham with a bark of friendly recognition. A young lady at the other side of the room (she was at least young by courtesy), who was pouring out tea, stopped short in this operation to greet the new visitor with a little soft exclamation, in which pleasure and sur-

prise mingled equally. The old lady also looked up smiling. She seemed both good-natured and distinguished, and she had the air—a sort of tired complacency—of a person who has been saying witty things for a whole afternoon, and is at last in the enjoyment of a well-deserved rest. She extended both hands to Rainham, who held them for a minute in his own, silently smiling down at her, before he released them to greet her companion.

She was a tall, pale girl in a black dress, whom at first sight the impartial observer might easily declare to be neither pretty nor young. As a matter of fact, she was younger than she seemed, for she was barely five-and-twenty, although her face and manner belonged to a type which, even in girlhood, already forestalls some of the gravity and reserve that arrive with years. As for her beauty, there were those who disputed it altogether; and yet even when one had gone so far as to declare that Mary Masters was plain, one

had, in justice, to add that she possessed none the less a distinct and delicate charm of her own. It was a daisy-like charm, differing in kind from the charm of Eve Sylvester, which was that of a violet or a child, perpetually perfuming the air. It could be traced at last—for she had not a good feature—to the possession of a pair of very soft and shy brown eyes, and of a voice, simply agreeable in conversation, which burgeoned out in song into the richest contralto imaginable, causing her to be known widely in society as ‘the Miss Masters who sings.’ Indeed, she had a wonderful musical talent, which she had cultivated largely. Her playing had even approved itself to the difficult Rubinstein; and, although she had a certain reputation for cleverness, the loss to society when she left the music-stool to mingle in it was generally felt not to be met by a corresponding gain; and, indeed, as a rule, people did not consider her separately. The generality were inclined

simply to accept her, in relation to her aunt, Lady Garnett, with whom she had lived since she was a girl of sixteen, as any other of that witty old woman's impedimenta—her pug Mefistofele, or her matchless enamels, or her Watteau fans. As she came towards him now with a cup in her hand, her pale face a little flushed, her dark hair braided very plainly and neatly above her high forehead, Rainham could not help thinking that she would make an adorable old maid.

'You look well, Mary,' he remarked, holding her at arm's length critically, with the freedom of an old friend. 'You look insultingly well—I hope you don't mean it.'

'I am afraid I do,' laughed the girl. 'I wish I could say as much for you.'

Rainham shook his head with burlesque solemnity, and sank down with his fragile cup into the most comfortable of the Louis Quinze chairs which he could select.

'It's delightful to be back again,' he remarked, letting his eyes wander round

the familiar walls. 'I know your things by heart, Lady Garnett; there's not one of them I could spare. Thanks, Mary, no sugar; cream, if you please. After all, I don't know anyone who has such charming rooms. Let me see if there is anything new. Yes, those enamels; introduce me, Mary, please. Yes, they are very nice. By the way, I picked up some old point for you at Genoa, only I have not unpacked it yet. But the Gustave Moreau, where is that? Ah, I see you have shifted it over the piano. Yes, it is exactly the same; you are all precisely the same; it's delightful, such constancy—delightful! I take it as a personal compliment. But where are all the delightful people?'

Lady Garnett smiled placidly.

'The delightful people have gone. To tell you the truth, I am just a little glad, especially as you have dropped in from the clouds, or the Riviera di Ponente—which is it, Philip?'

'To be frank with you, from neither. I

have it on my conscience to tell you that I have been back some days. I wanted to come here before.'

'Ah well, so long as you have come now!' said the old lady.

'Your knock was mystifying, Philip,' put in the girl presently; 'we expected nobody else but the Sylvesters, and when we heard your solitary step our hearts sank. We thought that Charles Sylvester had taken it into his head to come by himself.'

'He is a terrible young man,' said Lady Garnett; 'he is almost as limited as his mamma, and he takes himself more seriously. When he is with his sister one can tolerate him, but alone——'

She held up her thin wrinkled hands with a little gesture of elision, at which her expressive shoulders assisted. She was of French extraction, the last survivor of an illustrious family; and reconciled as she had become to England—for years she had hardly left London—a slight and

very pretty accent, and this trick of her shoulders, remained to remind people that her point of view was still essentially foreign. Rainham, who had from his boyhood found England somewhat a prison-house, adored her for this trait. The quaint old woman, indeed, with her smooth, well-bred voice, her elaborate complexion, her little dignified incongruities, had always been the greatest solace to him. She had the charm of all rococo things ; she represented so much that had passed away, exhaling a sort of elegant wickedness to find a parallel to which one had to seek back to the days of the Regency. Of course, in society, she passed for being very devout ; and, indeed, her little pieties, her unfailing attendance at Mass on days of Obligation, at the chapel of the French Embassy hard by, struck Rainham as most edifying. Really, he perceived that her devout attitude was purely traditional, a form of good manners. She remained the same wicked, charming old Sadducee as

before : her morocco - bound *paroissien* might appear on festivals and occasions ; she still slept as often as not of nights with 'Candide' under her pillow.

The knowledge of a certain sentiment which they shared towards the limitations of London (they were both persons strikingly without prejudice) lent a certain piquancy to their old-established relations, an allusive flavour to their conversation—it was always highly seasoned with badinage—that puzzled many of their common acquaintance enormously.

Mary Masters, as a shy and serious maiden, fresh from a country parsonage, remembered well the astonishment, mingled with something not unlike awe, with which she had first heard them talk. Philip Rainham had been calling, as it might be now, when she arrived, and Lady Garnett had promptly introduced him to her as her godson, because, as she remarked lightly, if he were not, he ought to have been. To which Philip had replied, in a like humour,

that it was all the same: if they hadn't that relation, at any rate their behaviour implied it.

It was a novelty in her small and serious experience to find herself in conjunction with such frivolity; she was almost inclined to be shocked. Nevertheless, in the ten years during which she had made her home in Parton Street, Mary Masters had surmounted her awe, if her astonishment still occasionally obtained. Neither her aunt nor Rainham had altered, nor had they grown perceptibly older.

Watching the latter to-day as he sat lolling back lazily, balancing his teacup, she was curiously reminded of her first impression of him; taking stock of her humorously, silently, in almost the same attitude, with the same sad eyes. And since Mary, too, had remained virtually unchanged, it is to the credit of the head of a particularly serious little daughter of the Puritans that she had ended by appreciating them both. In fact, she had dis-

covered that neither of them was so frivolous as it appeared, or, at least, that there were visitors in Parton Street who seemed less frivolous, and whose frivolity shocked her more. Her shy brown eyes were penetrative, and often saw more than one would have imagined, and at last they believed that they had seen through the philosophic indifference of Lady Garnett's shrug, the gentle irony of Rainham's perpetual smile, the various masks of tragic comedians on a stage where there is no prompter, where the footlights are most pitiless, and where the gallery is only too lavish of its cat-calls at the smallest slip. Beneath it all she saw two people who understood each other as well as any two persons in the world. Did they understand each other so well that they could afford to trifle? She had an idea that their silences were eloquent, and that they might well be lavish of the crudity of speech. Oh, they pretended very well! The young girl found something admirable

in the hard, polished surface which her aunt presented to the world: her rouge and her diamonds, her little bird-like air of living only in the present, of being intensely interested, of having no regrets—a manner to which Rainham responded so fluently, with an assumption that she was right, that things were an excellent joke. After all, perhaps they pretended too much; at least, she found herself often, when they were present, falling away into reveries full of conjecture, from which, as happened now, she only awoke with a slight blush to find herself directly addressed.

‘Wake up, Mary! we are talking of the Sylvesters. I was telling Philip that his little friend Eve has become entirely charming.’

‘Yes,’ said Mary slowly; ‘she is charming, certainly. Haven’t you seen her, Philip? You used to be constantly there.’

Rainham assumed the air of reflection.

‘Really, I believe I used, when Eve

was in short frocks, and Charles conspicuously absent. Like Lady Garnett, I find the barrister exhausting. He is very unlike his father.'

'We are going to Switzerland with them this summer, you know, Philip. Will you join us?'

'Ah!' he put his cup down, not responding for a moment. 'It would be delightful, but I am afraid impossible. You see, there's the dock; I have been away from it six months, and I shall have to repeat the process when the fogs begin. No, Lady Garnett, I won't be tempted.'

She began to press him, and they fenced rapidly for some minutes, laughing. Rainham had just been induced to promise that he would at least consider the proposition, when the footman announced Mr. and Miss Sylvester. They came in a moment later; and while the barrister, a tall well-dressed man, with the shaven upper lip and neat whisker of his class, and a back which seemed to bend with difficulty, explained

to Lady Garnett that his mother was suffering too much from neuralgia to come with them, Rainham resumed his acquaintance with the young girl. He had seen little of her during the past two years, and in the last of them, in which she had changed most, he had not seen her at all. It was with a slight shock, then, that he realized how completely she had grown up. He remembered her in so many phases of childhood and little girlhood, ranging up from a time when her speech was incoherent, and she had sat on his knee and played with his watch, to the more recent occasions when he had met her riding in the Park with her brother, and she had waved her little whip to him, looking particularly slim and pretty in the very trying costume which fashion prescribes for little girls who ride.

They had always been very good friends; she had been a most engaging little companion, and really, he reflected, he had been extremely fond of her. It

gave him a distinct pain to reflect that their relation had, in the nature of things, come to an end. Gradually, as they talked, the young girl growing out of the first restraint of her shyness, and falling back into something of her old manner, the first painful impression of her entire strangeness left Rainham. In spite of her mature little society air, her engaging attempts at worldliness, she was, after all, not so grown-up as she seemed. The child gleamed out here and there quite daintily, and as he indulged in reminiscence, and reminded her of some of their more remote adventures, her merriment found utterance very childishly.

‘Our most tragical encounter, though, was with the monkey. Have you forgotten that? It was on one of your birthdays—you had a good many of them in Florence—I forget which it was. You must have been about ten. I had taken you to the Zoological Gardens, such as they were.’

Her laughter rippled out softly again.

‘I remember,’ she nodded, ‘it was dreadful.’

‘Yes,’ he said ; ‘we were at the monkey-cage ; you had grown tired of feeding the ostrich with *centesimi*.’

‘Oh, Philip!’ she interrupted him ; ‘I never, *never* would have done such a thing. It was you who used to give the poor bird *centesimi*. I only used to watch.’

‘Ah, you connived at it, anyhow,’ he went on. ‘Well, we were feeding the monkeys, this time with melon - seeds, when we somehow aroused the ire of a particularly ugly brute, who must have been distantly connected with a bull. Anyhow, he made a grab at the scarlet *berret* you were wearing, just missed your hair, and demolished the cap.’

‘I remember,’ she laughed. ‘You tied your handkerchief round my head, like an old peasant woman, and took me back in a carriage. And mamma was dreadfully

angry about the cap, because she had bought it at Biarritz, and couldn't replace it in Italy. She thought you ought to have taken steps to get it back.'

'Dear me!' said Rainham solemnly, 'why didn't I think of it before? I wonder if it's too late to do anything now.'

The girl's laughter broke out again, this time attracting the attention of her brother, who was discussing the projected travels, with the aid of Bradshaw, at Mary Masters' side. He glanced at them askance, pulling at his collar in his stiff, nervous fashion a little uneasily.

'What a long time ago all that seems, Philip!' she remarked after awhile.

He was silent for a moment, examining his finger-nails intently.

'Yes,' he said rather sadly; 'I suppose it does. I dare say you wouldn't care much for the Zoo now?'

'Oh, I shouldn't mind,' she said gaily, 'if you will take me.'

But a move had been made opposite, and Charles Sylvester, coming up to them, overheard this last remark.

‘I think we must be off,’ he said, consulting his watch. ‘Where is Rainham going to take you?’

‘To Florence,’ she said, smiling, ‘to the Zoo.’

‘Ah, a good idea,’ he murmured. ‘Well, good-bye, Lady Garnett; good-day, Rainham. I am sorry to see you don’t seem to have benefited much by your winter abroad. I almost wonder you came back so soon. Was not it rather unwise? This treacherous climate, you know.’

‘Yes,’ said Rainham; ‘I, too, think you are right. I think I had much better have stayed—very much better.’

‘Ah, well,’ he said, ‘you must take care of yourself, and give us a look in if you have time.’

Eve looked up at him, flushing a little, as though she found her brother’s formal politeness lacking in hospitality. She was

struck then, as she had not been yet during her visit, by a curious lassitude in her old friend's face. It affected her with an unconscious pity, causing her to second her brother's somewhat chilly invitation more cordially.

The humour which had shone in Rainham's eyes while they had been talking seemed to have gone out suddenly, like a lamp, leaving them blank and tired. It shocked her to realize how old and ill he had become.

CHAPTER VI.

INDOLENCE and ill-health, in the opinion of many the salient points in Philip Rainham's character, had left him at forty with little of the social habit. The circle of his intimates had sensibly narrowed, and for the rest he was becoming more and more conscious that people whom one does not know exceedingly well are not worth knowing at all. The process of dining out two or three times a week in the company of two or three persons whose claims on his attention were of the slenderest he found a process attended with less and less pleasure the older he grew. There were few houses now which he frequented, and this year, when he had

made an effort to devote a couple of evenings to the renewal of some acquaintance of the winter, and had discovered, as he discovered anew each season, that the effort gave him no appreciable compensations for the disagreeables it involved, he made fresh resolutions of abstinence, and on the whole he kept them amazingly well.

For the most part, when he was not routed out by Lightmark (and since the young artist was in train to become a social acquisition this happened less frequently than of old), it was at Blackpool that he spent his evenings. He had, it is true, a standing invitation to dinner at Lady Garnett's when that old lady found herself at home ; but Portman Square was remote, and evening dress, to a man with one lung in a climate which had so fickle a trick of registering itself either at the extreme top or bottom of the thermometer, presented various discomforts. His den behind the office—a little sitting-room

with a bay - window facing Blackpool Reach, a room filled with books that had no relation to shipping, and hung round with etchings and pictures in those curiously low tones for which he had so unreasonable an affection — was what he cherished most in London. He read little now, but the mere presence of the books he loved best in rough, uneven cases, painted black, lining the walls, caressed him. As with persons one has loved and grown used to loving, it was not always needful that they should speak to him ; it was sufficient, simply, that they should be there. Neither did he write on these long, interminable evenings, which were prolonged sometimes far into the night. He had ended by being able to smile at his literary ambitions of twenty, cultivating his indolence as something choice and original, finding his destiny appropriate.

He spent the time in interminable reveries, sitting with a volume before

him, as often as not unopened, smoking incessantly, and looking out of the window. The habit amused himself at times ; it was so eminently symbolic of his destiny. Life, after all, had been to him nothing so much as that—a long looking out of window, the impartial spectatorship of a crowd of persons and passions from which he had come at last to seem strangely detached, almost as much as from this chameleon river, which he had observed with such satisfaction in all its manifold gradations of character and colour ; its curious cold grayness in the beginning of an autumnal dawn ; the illusion of warmth and depth which it sustained at noon, bringing up its burden of leviathans on the top of the flood ; its sheen on moonless nights, when only little punctures, green and red and orange, and its audible stillness, reminded him that down in the obscurity the great polluted stream stole on wearily, monotonously, everlastingly to the sea. It was changeful and changeless.

He thought he knew its effects by heart, but it had always new ones in reserve to surprise and delight him. He declared it at last to be inexhaustible. It was like a diamond on sunny days, flashing out light in every little ripple; in the late, sunless afternoon the light lay deeply within it, and it seemed jealous of giving back the least particle. He compared it then to an opal or a sapphire, which shine with the same parsimonious radiance.

One night, while he sat smoking in his wonted meditative fashion, he had a visitor—the painter Oswyn. He had almost forgotten his invitation, but he reminded himself of his first impression, and greeted him with a cordiality which the other seemed to find surprising. He took him into his sanctuary and found him whisky and a pipe; then he set himself to make the painter talk, a task which he found by no means arduous.

Oswyn was sober, and Rainham was surprised after awhile at his sanity. He

decided that, though one might differ from him, dissent from his premises or his conclusions, he was still a man to be taken seriously. His fluency was as remarkable as ever, and at first as spleenful; by-and-by his outrageous mood gave way, and, in response to some of Rainham's adroit thrusts, he condescended to stand on his defence. He could give a reasonable account of himself; was prepared clearly, and succinctly, and seriously with his justification. Rainham was impressed anew by his singleness, the purity of his artistic passion. His life might be disgraceful, indescribable: his art lay apart from it; and when he took up a brush an enthusiasm, a devotion to art, almost religious, steadied his hand.

'You may think me a charlatan,' he said, with the same savage earnestness, 'but I can tell you I am not. I may fail or I may succeed, as the world counts those things. It is all the same: I believe in myself. It is sufficient to me if I ap-

prove myself, and the world may go to damnation! What I care for is my idea! . . . yes, my idea, that's it! They can howl at me,' he went on; 'but they can never say of any stroke of my brush that I put it there for them. I could have painted pictures like Lightmark if I had cared, you know, but I did not care!'

'And yet he has great facility,' said Rainham tentatively.

'He has more,' said Oswyn bitterly, 'or, at least, he had—genius. And he has deliberately chosen to go the wrong way, to be conventional. He can't plead "invincible ignorance" like the others; he ought to know better. Well, he has his reward; but I can't forgive him.'

Rainham shrugged his shoulders, with something between a sigh and a laugh.

'Poor boy! he is young, you know. Perhaps he will live to see the errors of his ways.'

'When he's an Academician, I suppose?' suggested the other ironically. 'Do they

ever see the errors of their ways? If they do, they don't show it. No; he will marry a rich wife, and make speeches at banquets, and paint portraits of celebrities, for the rest of his days. And in fifty years' time people will say, "Lightmark, R.A.? Who the devil was he?"'

By this time the young moon had risen, and its cold light shimmered on the misty river. Rainham refilled his pipe, and opened the window still more widely.

'By Jove, what a night!' he said. 'What a night for a painter! I am sure you are longing to be out in it. I'm afraid there's nothing to show you in the dock at present; you must come down again when there's a ship coming in at night. I feel quite reconciled to the dock on those occasions. Shall we go for a stroll in the moonlight—and seek impressions?'

Oswyn's restless humour welcomed the suggestion, and he was already waiting, his soft felt hat in one ungloved hand, and

a heavy, quaintly carved stick in the other.

They stood for some minutes on the little, square, pulpit-like landing, at the top of the creaking wooden staircase which led down the side of the building from office to yard, listening to the faint drip of the water through the sluice-gates ; the wail of a child outside the walls, and the pacing step of the woman who hushed it ; the distant intermittent roar of the song which reached them through the often opened doors of a public-house. Presently the night-watchman lumbered out of his sentry-box by the gates, his dim lantern sounding pools of mysterious darkness, which were untouched by the solitary gas-lamp in the street outside, and which the faint moonlight only seemed to intensify.

Oswyn drew in a long breath of the cool, caressing air, momentarily straightening his bent figure. Then he gave a short laugh, which startled Rainham from the

familiar state of half-smiling reverie to which he was always so ready to recur.

‘The last time I saw the river like this, he said—‘the last time I was down here at night, that is—was when I went with a Malay model of mine to his favourite opium den.’

‘You have not repeated the experiment?’ asked Rainham absently.

‘No; not yet, at any rate. It made my hand shake so damnably for a week afterwards that I couldn’t paint. Besides, I doubt if I could find the place again. I couldn’t get the Malay to come away at all; he is probably there still.’

‘Beg your pardon, sir,’ said the night-watchman hoarsely, when they reached the bottom of the difficult staircase, ‘there’s been a young woman here asking for a gentleman of the name of Crichton. I told her there weren’t no one of that name here, and Mr. Bullen, sir, he saw her, and sent her away. I

thought I had better mention it to you, sir.'

'Crichton? Crichton?' repeated Rainham indifferently. 'I don't know anyone of that name. Some mistake, I suppose, or—— Well, sailors will be sailors! Thank you, Andrewes, that will do. Good-night—or, rather, we shall be back in half an hour or so.' He turned to Oswyn, who had been hanging back to avoid any appearance of interest in the conversation, for corroboration. 'You will come back, of course?'

'Rather late, isn't it? I think I had better catch some train before midnight, if there is one.'

'Oh, there are plenty of trains,' said Rainham vaguely. 'We can settle that matter later. I can give you a bed here, you know, or a berth, at any rate.'

As they stepped through the narrow opening in the gate, a dark form sprang forward out of the shadow, and then stopped timidly.

‘Oh, Cyril!’ cried a woman’s plaintive voice. ‘Cyril! I knew you were here, and they wouldn’t let me—— Ah, my God! it isn’t Cyril after all . . .!’

The voice—and it struck Rainham that it was not the voice of a woman of the sort one would expect to encounter in the streets at that hour—died away in a broken sob, and the girl fell back a step, almost dropping the child she carried in her arms.

Her evident despair appealed to Rainham’s somewhat inconveniently assertive sensibility.

He hesitated for a moment, glancing from the girl to Oswyn, and noting that the face, too, had a certain beauty which was not of the order affected by the women of Blackpool.

‘Don’t go,’ he said to Oswyn, who had withdrawn a few paces. ‘I won’t keep you a moment!’

The baby in the woman’s arms set up a feeble wail, and it was borne in upon

Rainham's mind that the unhappy creature with the white face and pleading dark eyes had been waiting long.

‘Didn’t my foreman tell you that the—that the gentleman you asked for is not here?’ he inquired gently. ‘No one here has ever heard of Mr. Crichton. I’m afraid you have made a mistake. . . . Hadn’t you better go home? I’m sure it would be best for your child.’

‘Home?’ echoed the girl bitterly. Then, changing her tone, ‘But I saw him here with my own eyes!’ she pleaded. ‘I saw him at the window there not a week ago quite plain, and then they told me he wasn’t here! I’m sure he would see me if he only knew—if he only knew!’

‘He may have been here,’ suggested Rainham doubtfully. ‘There are a great many people here from day to day, and we don’t always know their names. But I assure you he isn’t here now.’

The girl—for in spite of her pale misery she did not look more—drew

her dark shawl more closely round herself and the child with a little despairing shudder, glancing over her shoulder. Rainham let his eyes rest on the frail figure pityingly, and a thought of the river behind her struck him with a sudden chill.

He put his hand, almost surreptitiously, into his pocket.

‘Where do you live?’ he asked. ‘Near here?’ The girl mentioned a street which he sometimes passed through when economy of time induced him to make an otherwise undesirable short-cut to the railway-station. ‘Well,’ he said presently, ‘I can’t keep my friend here waiting, you know. Come and see me to-morrow morning about mid-day, and I will see if I can help you. Only you must promise me to go straight home now! And’—here he dropped a coin quickly into her hand—‘buy something for your child; you both look as if you wanted it.’

The girl looked at him dumbly for a moment.

‘I will come, sir, and—and thank you!’ she said, with a quaver in her voice. And then, in obedience to Rainham’s playfully threatening gesture, she turned away.

Rainham gazed after her until she had turned the corner.

‘I’m sorry to have treated you to this—scene,’ he said apologetically, as he joined Oswyn, who was gazing over the narrow bridge. ‘I felt bound to do something for the girl, after she had been wasting all that time outside my gates. Did you notice what a pretty, refined face she had? I wonder who the man can be—Crichton, Cecil Crichton, wasn’t it? . . . I never heard the name before. It doesn’t sound like a sailor’s name.’

‘Cecil Crichton?’ echoed the other. ‘No . . . and yet it sounds familiar. Perhaps I am thinking of the Admirable, though he wasn’t Cecil, as far as I remember. The old story, I suppose.

Cecil Crichton—ah, Cyril Crichton?' he repeated. Then, dismissing the subject somewhat brutally, 'Ah, well, it's no business of mine! Will you give me a light? Thanks!'

CHAPTER VII.

AT three o'clock Lightmark dismissed his model—an Italian, with a wonderfully fine torso and admirable capabilities for picturesque pose, whom he had easily persuaded to abandon his ice-cream barrow and to sit for him two or three times a week, acting the part of studio servant in the intervals.

‘That will do, Cesare,’ he said, ‘*aspetto persone* ; besides, you’re shivering : I shall have you catching cold next, and I can’t paint while you’re sneezing. Yes, you’re quite right, *è un freddo terribile*, considering that it’s July. Off with you now, and come again at the same time on Friday. *Si conservi*—that’s to say, don’t

get drunk in the interval ; it makes you look such a brute that I can't paint you.'

While the model transformed himself from a scantily-attired Roman gladiator into an Italian of the ordinary Saffron Hill description, Lightmark hastily washed his brushes, turned down his shirt-sleeves, and donned the becoming velvet painting-jacket which Mrs. Dollond had so much admired.

'I hope they won't notice Cesare's pipe,' he said anxiously. 'Even though he doesn't smoke here, it always seems to hang about. Perhaps I had better open the window and burn a pastille. And now, are we prepared to receive Philistia? Yes, I don't think the place looks bad, and—but perhaps Mrs. Sylvester mightn't like the gladiator. He certainly is deucedly anatomical at present. I'll go and leave him in Copal's studio, and then I can borrow his tea-things at the same time.'

The studio was a lofty room on the

ground-floor, with an elaborately-devised skylight, and a large window facing north, through which a distant glimpse of Holland Park could be obtained. Lightmark had covered the floor with pale Indian matting, with a bit of strong colour here and there, in the shape of a modern Turkish rug. For furniture, he had picked up some old chairs and a large straight-backed settee with grotesquely-carved legs, which, with the aid of a judicious arrangement of drapery, looked eminently attractive, and conveyed an impression of comfort which closer acquaintance did not altogether belie. Then there was the platform, covered with dark cloth, on which his models posed; the rickety table with many drawers, in which he kept brushes and colours; a lay figure, disguised as a Venetian flower-girl, which had collapsed tipsily into a corner; two or three easels; and a tall, stamped leather screen, which was useful for backgrounds. A few sketches, mostly unframed, stood

in a row on the narrow shelf which ran along the pale-green distempered walls; and more were stacked in the corners—some in portfolios, and some with their dusty backs exposed to view. The palette which he had been using lay, like a great fantastic leaf, upon the table, amid a chaos of broken crayons, dingy stumps, photographs of sitters, pellets of bread, disreputable colour-tubes, and small bottles of linseed-oil, varnish, and turpentine. A sketch for Mrs. Sylvester's portrait, in crayons, was propped against the foot of an easel (Lightmark hoped that her son might buy it for his chambers); the canvas which he had prepared against the much-delayed sitting due from Miss Sylvester exposed its blank surface on another. A tall Japanese jar full of purple and yellow irises, a tribute to his expected guests, stood on the dusty black stove.

He had barely had time to arrange the borrowed tea-things, and to set a kettle on a little spirit-lamp behind the screen,

when Mrs. Dollond and her husband were announced. He threw his black sombrero somewhat theatrically into a corner, and advanced with effusion to meet them. Mrs. Dollond had taken a decided interest in the young painter ever since the delightfully uncandid reflection of her by no means youthful beauty which he had exhibited at the Grosvenor had provoked so much comment among her friends.

She was a plump little fair-haired woman, with blue eyes, a very pink and white complexion, small hands, and a passion for dress with which people who had known her before her marriage, as a slim maiden devoted to sage-green draperies and square-toed shoes, declined to credit her, until they were told that she had, to put it plainly, grown fat—a development which compelled her to give up æstheticism and employ a *modiste*.

Her husband, who followed her into the room, carrying her impedimenta, wore the bored expression of the R.A. who is ex-

pected to admire the work of an outsider. He was the abject slave of his good-natured wife—she *was* good-natured, in spite of her love of scandal—and his only fault from her point of view, and his greatest one in the eyes of people in general, lay in an unfortunate habit of thinking aloud, a dangerous characteristic, which persons who are apt to find themselves in the position of critic should at any cost eradicate. Luckily, his benevolence was such that these outspoken comments were never really virulent, and not often offensive.

Mrs. Dollond seated herself smilingly on the least rickety chair, disposed of her veil with one neatly-gloved hand, and prepared a tortoiseshell eyeglass for action with the other.

‘What a charming portrait!’ she said, pointing with her plump index-finger to the sketch of Mrs. Sylvester. ‘Do I know the lady, I wonder? Oh! I do believe it’s that Mrs. Sylvester.’

‘Yes,’ said Lightmark. ‘If you remember, you introduced me to her at the Academy soirée last year. I expect her here this afternoon, with her daughter. I am going to paint Miss Sylvester’s portrait.’

‘Ah,’ said Mrs. Dolland mischievously, ‘and that accounts for the pastille. You never made such preparations when *I* sat to you. I suppose you thought that a painter’s wife could not possibly object to tobacco.’

‘And she certainly doesn’t, judging by her consumption of cigarettes!’ interposed her husband.

‘Hugh, I’m ashamed of you! You know I’m a martyr to asthma—and cigarettes aren’t tobacco. But how old is Miss Sylvester? Is she pretty?’

‘Don’t ask me to describe her, Mrs. Dollond. Wait till you see her—she’s coming, you know. What do you think of that river-scape, most reverend signor? It’s one of the little things I’ve been doing

down at Rainham's Dock—down at Blackpool.'

The Academician tried to appear interested as he assumed the conventional bird-like pose of the picture-gazer and surveyed the sketch.

'Very pretty—very pretty! I should hardly have thought it was the Thames, though. It isn't muddy enough. In fact, the whole scheme of colour is much too clean for London. Quite absurd! Not a bit like it! Eh, my dear, what was I saying? Oh yes, I like the effect of the sunlight on that brown sail immensely. It's really very clever, very clever.'

Mrs. Dollond, who never knew what her husband would say next, welcomed the influx of a small throng of visitors with a sigh of relief.

The Sylvesters and Philip Rainham, arriving at the same time, found the little studio almost crowded. Besides the Dollonds there were two or three of the Turk Street fraternity; a young sculptor, newly

arrived from Rome, with his wife ; Dionysus F. Quain, an American interested in petroleum, who had patronized Lightmark also at Rome ; and Copal, whose studio was in the same building, and who was manifestly anxious about his Chelsea tea-cups.

Mrs. Sylvester greeted her *protégé* with a flattering degree of warmth which was entirely absent from the stare and conventional smile with which she honoured Mrs. Dollond, and the somewhat impertinent air of patronage which she wore when one or two of the young artists were introduced to her. If they did not mind, Mrs. Dollond was inclined to be resentful, for the moment, at least ; and, as a preliminary attack, she maliciously encouraged Eve, who, ensconced in a corner, blissfully unconscious of the maternal anxiety which the other matron had detected, was eagerly turning over the contents of a portfolio which she had unearthed from its lurking-place behind her chair.

Rainham was looking over her shoulder, admiring the charming poise of the girl's head, and the contours of her wrists and hands, as she submitted the drawings to his inspection. Charles Sylvester stationed himself close by, and devoted himself to button-holing the American senator, to the obvious discomfort of his victim, whose knowledge of Pennsylvanian oil-wells was infinitely greater than his acquaintance with the rudiments of summary jurisdiction, as practised in his native State, and who, after hazarding a remark to the effect that Judge Lynch had long since retired from the Bench, had, as he would have put it, 'pretty considerably petered out.'

'I hope my daughter isn't indiscreet?' Mrs. Sylvester had hazarded, after catching Lightmark's eye on its return journey from a glance in the direction of the little group in the corner; and the young man had reassured her hastily, before misgivings had time to assail him, and when they did, he hoped for the best. For a

painter's portfolio is, after all, hardly less confidential than a diary, and may be on occasion almost as compromising, in spite of the fact that the records it contains are written in cipher.

The sunlight, mellowed to a dull straw colour by its passage through London air, slanted in at the window, falling first on Charles Sylvester's handsome face, with its eminently professional, severely-cut features, and the careful limitation of whisker, which seemed so completely in harmony with his shaven upper lip and the unsympathetic scrutiny of his double eyeglass ; then, losing some of its brightness among the little ripples of brown hair which a gracious Providence had forbidden her hat to conceal, fell like a halo upon the pale green wall behind Eve's head.

The young artists—the 'boys,' as they would have called themselves—were circulating busily with teacups and *petits fours*, and the chatter of voices bore testimony to the preponderance of the

Bohemian element. It is only the dwellers on the confines who lose their voices in the Temple of Art—a goddess who, to judge by her votaries, is not wont to take pleasure in silence.

‘Oh,’ said Eve, in reply to one of Rainham’s remarks, ‘is that Bordighera? What lovely blue water! and what perfectly delicious little fishing-boats! I should like to go there. Charles is going to take us to Lucerne in a week or two, you know, when the Long Vacation begins. But I suppose we shall hardly get to Italy.’

‘Yes, that’s Bordighera’—with a sigh—‘my happy hunting-ground. And the water is much bluer really—only don’t tell Dick I said so. Yes, you ought to go there. If you stayed late enough you would have me dropping in on you one fine day, as soon as the fogs begin here. Happy thought! Why shouldn’t we all winter out there?’

‘That would be nice,’ said Eve, rather

doubtfully ; ‘ but, you know, there’s Charles—he would have to come back for the Law Courts in the autumn, and he would be so lonely all by himself. And —and there’s my portrait. Mr. Lightmark wants to get that ready for next year’s Academy ; and I can’t sit to him very often, as it is, because of *chaperons*, you know.’

Meanwhile Lightmark was telling Mrs. Dollond, in a confidential undertone, some story of a fair American sitter, who, on his expressing himself dissatisfied with his efforts worthily to transfer her complexion to canvas, had at once offered to send her maid round to his studio with an assortment of her favourite *poudre de rose*. Dollond listened with an amused smile to a recital of the sculptor’s impressions of the Salon, which he had taken on his way from Rome. Copal was making desperate efforts to count his precious teacups, a task which their scattered positions rendered distressingly difficult. Charles

Sylvester was somewhat listlessly cross-examining a P.R.A. in embryo as to the exact meaning of 'breadth' in a painting; and Mr. Quain had been making his way as unostentatiously as the creakiness of his boots would permit towards the door. Eve had despatched one of 'the boys' in search of a portfolio to replace the one which she had exhausted, and another had been entrusted with the safe bestowal of her empty teacup. The new portfolio, when it arrived, proved to be filled, not as the others, with landscapes and water-scapes, but with studies from life—Capri fisher-girls, groups of market people, Venetian boatmen, and hasty sketches for portraits.

Eve paused rather longer than usual over one of these, the picture of a pretty fair-haired girl, dressed as Pierrette, the general lack of detail and absence of background only making the vigorously outlined face more distinct.

'What a pretty girl, Philip!' said the

young critic presently ; ‘ and how curiously she’s dressed ! What is she intended to represent ? Is it a fancy dress ? Mr. Rainham, if you don’t attend, I won’t show you any more pictures.’

‘ Tyrant,’ said Rainham absently, as he carried his eyes from the contemplative stare with which they had been regarding the vagaries of a butterfly on the skylight. ‘ What have you found now ?—*Kitty*, by Jove !’

He had no sooner uttered these last three words, in a very different tone to that of his previous idle remarks, than he cursed his indiscretion. It was a piece of *gaucherie* which he would find it hard to forgive in himself, and Lightmark might well resent it.

‘ Kitty ?’ asked Eve, with some surprise, ‘ who is Kitty ? Mr. Lightmark, please tell us who this charming young lady, whom Mr. Rainham calls Kitty, is, since he won’t.’

‘ Kitty ?’ repeated Lightmark, with only

a momentary hesitation, which the suddenness of the query might well account for ; 'I'm afraid I don't quite remember. There are so many Kitties, you know. All models are either Kitty or Polly. But if Rainham says it's Kitty, depend upon it he's right. He's got a wonderful memory for faces, especially pretty ones. Yes,' he added mischievously, 'you ask Rainham.'

Mrs. Sylvester looked uneasy, and, to her subsequent disgust, began to press 'dear Mrs. Dollond' to come and see her.

Charles, who had looked up sharply at the first mention of the name which had so disturbed the usually imperturbable Rainham, fixed his interrogative glasses first on the latter and then on Lightmark, and finally let them rest, with an expression of inquiring censure, on Rainham, whose confusion savoured to his mind so unmistakably of guilt that 'Gentlemen of the jury' rose almost automatically to

his lips. Nor did Rainham's attempt to smooth matters assist him.

'I must have seen the girl at the studio,' he said, 'when Lightmark was painting her. It's certainly a striking likeness, and that's what astonished me, you know. Almost like seeing a ghost. Ah, that little fellow used to sit for Lightmark in Rome—little sunburnt ruffian. We picked him up on the Ghetto, almost starving, and he got quite an artistic connection before we left. He was positively growing too fat ; prosperity spoiled him as a model.'

'Really?' said Eve listlessly. 'I don't think I want to look at any more drawings ; one can have too much of a good thing, and it must be time for us to go. We're dining out, and Charles doesn't like dressing in a hurry. Yes, mamma is buttoning her gloves. Good-bye, Mr. Rainham. Shall we see you again before we go to Switzerland? Ah, well, let's hope so. Au revoir, Mr. Lightmark. If

you really think it's worth while for me to give you a solitary sitting next week——'

'If you would be so good. You see, I should have some ideas to go on with. Don't I deserve some reward, too, for allowing Rainham to monopolize you all the afternoon? And if you don't give me a sitting now, I'm afraid you will forget all about it when you come back to town; whereas, if we make a beginning, you will have to see it through—you will be compromised.'

'What a stupid expression!' thought Mrs. Sylvester as the carriage rolled along the Kensington highroad.

Charles was unusually silent during the drive. The subject which occupied his thoughts was not one which he would have dreamed of ventilating even with his mother, and Eve's presence seemed to render the faintest allusion to it impracticable.

He had no great affection or even

regard for Philip Rainham, whom he contemplated with that undefined disdain which a younger man so often feels for one who is too old to be on his own level, and too young to inspire reverence. The half-pitying regard which Mrs. Sylvester bestowed on the man who had been to her husband as a very dear younger brother had never furthered Rainham's advancement in her son's favour ; and the manner in which Eve had centred her childish affections in Philip, who had made her his especial favourite, was even more prejudicial to his interests in that quarter. Hitherto, indeed, Silvester's vague dislike had been so undemonstrative and immaterial that he would hardly have owned to it as such, and far less would he have acknowledged that he was, however unconsciously, feeling for a peg on which to hang it, for ground to support it ; and yet from the first moment when the man's startled voice drew the questioning eyes upon his embarrassment, the judicial mind

had been able to plume itself upon the penetration which had enabled it to detect something of doubtful odour about him from the first. 'Kitty!' That word might explain so much—Rainham's long sojourns away from his business, for example.

Charles looked at Eve and frowned. Decidedly, thought the young moralist, the old intimacy must be discouraged. Nor did the fact that Rainham had been the source of his first brief, as well as of subsequent others, though it was not forgotten, suggest the advisability of a compromise ; he even began to take a certain pride in the determination with which he was bringing himself to contemplate the sacrifice of so useful a friendship.

When they reached home there was barely time to dress for dinner, and Charles had no opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* discussion of the situation with his mother that evening. And as he breakfasted early next day and dined at the club, he

had ample time in which to determine that, for the present, he would avoid anything in the shape of a family conference, and would content himself with keeping his eye on the *mauvais sujet*.

CHAPTER VIII.

As soon as Lightmark and Rainham were left alone in the twilight of the studio, the former flung himself into a chair with a sigh of relief, and devoted himself to rolling and lighting a cigarette. Rainham picked up his hat, consulted his watch, with a preoccupation of mind which prevented him from noticing what the time was, and, refusing the proffered tobacco-pouch and the suggested whisky-and-soda, seemed about to go. Then he stopped, with his back turned towards his host and a pretence of examining a sketch.

‘I’m sorry I made such an ass of myself about that study—that girl, you know,’ he

said presently. 'The fact is, I saw her the other day, and the coincidence was rather startling.'

Lightmark blew a light cloud of smoke from his lips before he spoke.

'Oh, it doesn't matter in the least, old man. You didn't implicate me, as it happened, though I'm afraid you got yourself into rather hot water. A poor devil of a painter must have models, and it's recognised, but men of business——! It's quite another thing. There's no possible connection between girls and dry-docks.' Then he added lightly, 'Where are you going to dine to-night? Let's go to one of our Leicester Square haunts, or shall we get into a hansom and drive to Richmond? I've sold old Quain a picture, and I feel extravagantly inclined. What do you say? Under which *chef*? Speak, or let's toss up.'

Rainham appeared to consider for a moment; then he sat down again.

'About that girl,' he said; 'I suppose you

do remember something about her? She must have been very pretty when you painted her, though she's nothing wonderful now, poor thing! I don't want to pump you, Dick, but she seems to have been pretty badly treated, and I want to see if I can't help her.'

'Help her!' with a shrug. 'For goodness' sake tell me: is it Don Quixote or Don Lothario that you are playing?'

'I should have thought you need hardly have asked,' answered the other a little sadly. 'I found the wretched creature waiting, with an equally wretched baby, both apparently not far from starvation, outside the dock the other night; and—well, I thought she might be waiting for you.'

Lightmark threw the stump of his cigarette into a corner viciously, with a dangerous glance at the other.

'Why the devil should she have been waiting for me? Did she say she was waiting for me? How should a model know that I had been painting there? But

I don't want to quarrel with you, and, after all you've done for me, I suppose you've a certain right to put yourself *in loco parentis*, and all that sort of thing. Tell me all you have found out about the girl—all she has told you, that is to say, and then I'll see what I can do.'

This masterly suggestion seemed to Rainham both plausible and practical, and he proceeded to unfold the whole story of his first meeting with Kitty. When he reached the part of his narrative which brought out the girl's explanation that she was seeking to speak with a Mr. Crichton, Lightmark looked at him again covertly, with the same threatening light in his glance. Then, apparently reassured, he resigned himself again to listen, with a cigarette unlighted between his fingers.

'You say Oswyn heard the whole story?' he asked, when Rainham had finished. 'Did the girl seem to know him? Or did *he* seem to have heard of —of this Crichton before?'

‘No,’ said Rainham reflectively ; ‘the girl didn’t know Oswyn, though, on the other hand, he seemed certain that he had seen her face somewhere—probably in that study of yours, by the way ; and he appeared to think that I ought to have heard of Crichton—Cyril Crichton. He told me that the man wrote clever, scurrilous articles on art and the drama for the *Outcry*. But I don’t read English papers much. You see, our difficulty is that Cyril Crichton is obviously a *nom de plume*, and no one—not even the people at the *Outcry* office—know, or will say, who the man is ; Kitty has tried. I suppose the editor knows all right, but he is discreet.’

‘Ah!’ cried Lightmark. ‘Now I remember something about her. Have you got your hat? Let’s get into a hansom, and go and dine—I’m positively starving. I’ll stand you a dinner at the Cavour—standing you a dinner will be such a new sensation ; and new sensations are the only things worth living for. I will tell you

about Kitty in the cab. What a beneficent old beggar you are !'

As they drove rapidly eastward along the High Street of Old Kensington, where the pale orange of the lamplight was just beginning to tell in the dusk, Lightmark explained how, some two years ago or more, he had been talking to a stranger in a railway carriage, and lamenting the difficulty of finding really pretty girls who would act as models ; how the stranger had told him that he knew of such an one—a dressmaker's apprentice, or something of that sort, who found the work and hours too hard ; and how, finally, Kitty had called at his studio—the old one in Bloomsbury—and had sat to him, perhaps half a dozen times, before vanishing from his knowledge. This account had been freely interspersed with exclamations on the beauty of the evening light in the Park and the subtle charm of the hour after sunset, more exquisite in the clear atmosphere of Paris, but still sufficiently lovely even in

London, and acknowledged by both of them to be one of the few compensations accorded to the dwellers in the much-abused Metropolis.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Rainham penitently ; ‘I had a stupid sort of idea that you were mixed up in the business somehow. I thought so even before I saw the sketch, because I couldn’t understand whom else she could have been looking for at the dock. It’s very mysterious!’

‘I shouldn’t bother about the girl if I were you,’ replied the other light-heartedly. ‘Even if I had been mixed up with her, as you gracefully express it, *you* wouldn’t have anything to do with it. I believe you think I’ve been playing the devil with her now, you old moralist! Hear me swear, by yon pale—— Dash it! there isn’t a moon—well, by the cresset on the top of the Empire, that the young person in question has been my model for a brief space, and nothing more. Only my model, in the strictest sense of

the word. No, I'll pay the cab, for once in a way.'

When they had dined, sitting at their favourite table, which, from its position at the end, commanded a view of the bright exotic room, with its cosmopolitan contents, their wants cared for by the head-waiter, who adored Lightmark for his knowledge of his mother-tongue, recognising and being recognised by the forgotten of their acquaintance who were also dining there, Lightmark proposed an adjournment to the little theatre in Dean Street hard by, where 'Niniche' was being played for the last time by a clever company from across the Channel.

'We must go to the theatre,' he said, 'unless you prefer a hall; I confess I'm sick of them. I haven't satisfied my ideas of extravagance nearly yet. We will go and sit in the stalls at the Royalty and see Jane May and the others; it will remind us of old days.'

'But, my dear fellow,' expostulated the

other, 'it's so late, and we're in morning dress. Let's go to-morrow night instead.'

'Ah no! to-morrow I shan't be in the right mood. Never put off till to-morrow, you know. Our not being in evening dress won't matter a bit, they'll only think we're critics ; and "Niniche" doesn't begin till nine.'

On their speedy arrival at the modest portals of the little theatre, Lightmark instructed his companion, with an air of mystery, to wait, and presently emerged, smiling, from a triumphant encounter with the gentleman presiding at the box-office.

'They had no stalls left,' he whispered ; 'but they're going to put us in two chairs at the side.'

The house, with the exception of the more popular places, was crowded ; and the boisterous absurdity of the farce was at its height. Rainham at first felt quite disconcerted by the proximity of the ludicrous figure in bathing dress who was leaning over the footlights, and declaiming

his woes with a directness of appeal to the audience which alone would have marked the nationality of the robust actor, who was creating so much mirth out of the extremely hackneyed situation. He had got into the wrong bathing-machine (Lightmark seemed to find it intensely amusing) and the trousers of the rightful occupant only came down to his knees. Rainham at first was disconcerted, and then he began to feel bored. He fell into a semi-comatose state of contemplation, from which he was only aroused by the cadence on his ear of one of the most charming voices he had ever heard. So he characterized it, to Lightmark's amusement, when they were discussing their cigarettes and the *jeune première* in the interval between the acts.

‘Oh for an epithet to describe her!’ said Lightmark, catching his friend's enthusiasm. ‘She isn't exactly pretty—yes, she *is* pretty, but she isn't beautiful! She's got any amount of what dramatic critics

call *chic*. Don't shudder—I hate the word quite as much as you do, but it was inevitable. The only thing I feel sure about is that she's *espiègle*, and altogether delightful. And how funny that man is, or would be, if the authors had only given him a better chance! The fun of the piece is like those trousers—it only comes down to his knees.'

'What I admire most is her voice,' said the other inconsequently. 'How is it that French actresses have such beautiful voices? Freedom from fogs can't be the only cause. And it's got all that delicious plaintiveness——'

'Yes,' interposed Lightmark, 'it's the voice of a true Parisian *femme de siècle*, *fin de siècle*. There's the bell; let's go and hear some more of it.'

After the second act Lightmark, in whom the influence of the evening was beginning to manifest itself in the shape of a geniality which was absent in a great degree from his more serious hours, and

which had undoubtedly won him more friends than the other slightly pugnacious phase of his temperament, decided that Niniche was really very like Miss Sylvester, only less beautiful, and asserted that he was confident that she was younger than the newspapers made out.

Later, before the two friends parted on the steps of the modest club which included both in its list of town members, Lightmark assumed an air of mystery, sighed once or twice, and looked at his friend with an expression in which forgiveness, reproach, and the lateness of the hour were strangely commingled.

‘Old boy,’ he said, bending his eyebrows with an effort towards gravity, ‘I’m really rather cut up about that business—you thinking that I was playing the gay deceiver, and all that sort of thing, you know. It was unworthy of you, Philip—it was, really. Dash it! I’ve been in love for ever so long. All the summer, seriously; I’m going to get married—settle down, range

myself. Cut all you ribs of bachelors. . . . But perhaps she won't see it. Oh, Lord! . . . Damn it all! Why don't you congratulate me, eh?'

Rainham was growing more and more serious, and it was with a real heartache and a curious apprehension of a moral blow that he answered, as gaily as he could :

'You're going a little too fast, Dick. If you haven't asked the girl, it's rather too early for congratulations, however irresistible your attractions may be. Who—who is it, Dick?'

'Oh, come, you know well enough. Eve—I wonder if she'll let me call her Eve? Eve! Isn't it a pretty name?'

'I wish you hadn't told me this, Dick,' said the other, with more of the familiar weariness in his voice. 'Are you sure you mean it? I don't believe you've thought it out. Why, what do you suppose Mrs. Sylvester will say, and Charles Sylvester?'

'You think they won't have anything to

do with a poor devil of an artist, I suppose? Right you are, sir; but when the poor devil has a rich and gouty uncle, who is disposed to be friendly. . . . See? I think that alters the complexion of the case. You know, the Sylvesters are awfully well connected, and so on, but they haven't got much money. Mrs. Sylvester has a life annuity, and Charles—whom I always want to call “Chawles,” because he's so pompous—has got his professional income. And Eve has got a little, enough to dress her, I should think. “Payable quarterly on her attaining the age of twenty-one years, or marrying under that age, whichever shall first happen.” I've looked it all up at Somerset House. Last will and testament of Sylvester Charles Sylvester, Esq. I know they're rather ambitious, and wouldn't look at me if it wasn't for the Colonel. But the Colonel is a solid fact, and I've no doubt they think he's richer than he is. And I am making money, though you mightn't think it.'

‘I don’t believe Mrs. Sylvester has thought about it at all,’ said Rainham doubtfully. ‘Eve is so young, and young artists are never looked on as marrying men. Take my advice and think about it.’

‘*You* call her Eve, do you? Ah, well, I won’t be jealous of you, old boy. You shall come to the wedding and be best man ; or no, the Colonel will be best man, I suppose? I can imagine him returning thanks for the bridesmaids in the most dazzling white waistcoat that was ever starched. Good-night ; see you again soon.’

‘I don’t know how it is,’ thought Rainham, as he walked up Old Compton Street on his way to the attic near the British Museum which he rented when he was in England for use on occasions of this kind. ‘It’s very stupid of me, but I can’t bear the idea of Eve marrying. A species of jealousy, I suppose ; not ordinary jealousy, of course. And yet why not? I have never thought of her as anything but a

child . . . why shouldn't Lightmark marry her? He's young, and good-looking, and sure to get on ; and I'm a selfish old wreck. Yes, he shall marry her, and I will buy his pictures.' Still, he shook his head even as he formulated this generous solution of the question, and could not induce himself to regard the position with equanimity, though he sat up till broad daylight wrestling with it. 'I wonder if I am in love,' he said, with a bitter laugh, as he shook the ashes out of his last pipe.

CHAPTER IX.

THE upper end of the Park is never so fashionably frequented as its southern regions, and Rainham, whose want of purpose had led him past gay carpet-beds and under branching trees nearly to the Marble Arch, was hardly surprised to recognise among the heterogeneous array of promenaders, tramps, and nurse-maids, whom the heat of the slanting sun had prompted to occupy the benches dotted at intervals along the Row, a face whose weary pallor caused him a pang of self-reproach, Kitty!

For the last few days, since his encounter with her portrait at Lightmark's studio, he had scarcely given her troubles

a thought. When the girl saw him, after a startled look and movement, she seemed to shrink still further into the folds of her rusty black cloak, and, to avoid meeting Rainham's eyes, bent her head over the child who was seated at her side. He found something irresistibly charming and pathetically generous in the girl's spontaneous denial of any claim to his notice, although, except that he had promised to let her know anything he might learn of the whereabouts of the father of her child, he would have found it hard to establish in the mind of an outside critic that any such claim in fact existed.

‘Well, my poor child,’ he said softly, as he dropped into one of the vacant seats on the same bench, ‘how goes it with you and the little one?’

‘Oh, sir, you shouldn't speak to me—not here. Anyone might see you. Pray go. I know I shall get you into trouble, and you so kind!’

These words were spoken in a rapid,

frightened whisper, and with an apprehensive glance at the intermittent stream of carriages passing within a few yards of them. Rainham shrugged his shoulders pitifully, but found it rather difficult to say anything. Certainly, his reputation was running a risk, and he felt that his indifference was somewhat exceptional.

‘I’m sorry to say I’ve got no news for you,’ he said presently, after a silent pause, during which he had observed that the wide-eyed child was really far prettier than many who (as he had been assured by the complacent matrons who exhibited them) were ‘little cherubs,’ and that it was as scrupulously cared for as the little cherubs, even in their exhibition array. ‘I haven’t been able to discover anything; but you mustn’t despair—we shall find him sooner or later.’

The girl glanced at him irresolutely, and then dropped her eyes again, leaning over the child.

‘It’s no good, sir,’ she said. ‘I’m only

sorry to have given you so much trouble already. He won't come back—he's tired of me. He could find me if he wanted to, and watching and hunting for him like this would only set him more and more against me.'

Rainham, as he listened to her, rather puzzled by her sudden change of attitude since their last interview, was forced to admit mentally that her reasoning, if it lacked spontaneity, was, at all events, indisputably sound ; and while he found himself doubting whether the victim was not better versed in worldliness than he had at first suspected, he still felt a curious reluctance which, though he was half ashamed of his delicacy, prevented him from suggesting that, sentimental reasons apart, the betrayer still ought to be discovered, if only in order to force him to provide for the maintenance of his child. It hardly, perhaps, occurred to him that he, after all, would be the person who would suffer most, and he certainly did not for an instant credit the

girl with any ulterior designs upon his purse.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ he said feebly. ‘Perhaps he does not know where you are. And I dare say, if he saw the child——’

‘The child?’ echoed the woman bitterly. ‘That’s just the worst of it!’

Rainham sighed, forced again to acknowledge his lower standing in the wisdom of the world. He would have given a great deal to be able to get up and go.

‘Then you don’t want me to employ a detective, or to advertise, or—or to make an appeal to the editor of the *Outcry*?’

Mrs. Crichton seemed to welcome the opportunity afforded by this direct questioning.

‘No,’ she said, ‘I think it would be better not. I don’t want to seem ungrateful, sir—and I’m sure I thank you very, very much for all you have done for me—but I think you had better take no more

trouble about it. If I can get work I shall do all right.'

In spite of the girl's evident attempt to pull herself together, her voice was less brave than her words, and they conveyed but little assurance to the listener. He shrugged his shoulders somewhat impatiently : the interview was beginning to tell upon his nerves.

'Of course, it's for you to decide, and I suppose you have thought it well out, and have good reason for this alteration of purpose. But when you talk about work——?'

He finished his sentence with a note of inquiry and a half-apologetic glance at her slight form and frail white fingers.

'I haven't always been a model,' she explained with some dignity. 'Would to God I never had! I can sew better than most, and I can work a type-machine. That's what I used to do before he came. But type-writing work isn't so easy to get as it was, and I am out of practice.'

It occurred to him for a moment to ask the girl whether she could remember sitting for Mr. Lightmark, but he felt that Dick might resent the introduction of his name ; and, remembering that she had told him that, for a time, before her health gave way, her artist patrons had been numerous, he dismissed the idea as not likely to be profitable.

As they spoke, she with her mournful eyes turned on Rainham's sympathetic face, he absently following the movements of the child as it laboriously raised a small edifice of gravel-stones on the seat between them, neither of them noticed the severely correct figure in the frock-coat and immaculate hat who passed close behind with observant eyeglass fixed upon the little group, and with an air which, after the first flush of open-mouthed surprise, was eloquently expressive of regretful indignation and the highest motives.

Charles Sylvester continued his walk for

a distance of about fifty paces, and then seated himself in a position to command a view of the persons in whom he was interested.

‘I don’t like watching Rainham like this,’ he said to himself; ‘but it’s a duty which I owe to society.’

That the man was Rainham was as obvious as that the woman he was talking to was of a far lower rank in life than his own. And then there was the child!

‘By Jove!’ said Sylvester sententiously, ‘it’s worse than I thought. People really ought to be warned. I suppose it’s that girl he was talking about at the studio the other day; and he tried to shift her on to Lightmark. What a hypocrite the man must be!’

He was not, however, for long called upon to maintain, in the interests of society, his position of espionage; for Rainham, warned of the lapse of time by the clock which adorns the Park lodge, presently became aware that, if he was to

fulfil his intention of calling on Mrs. Sylvester, he had no time to spare ; and when he rose from his seat Charles Sylvester thought it advisable to resume the walk which his zeal had induced him to interrupt.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER all, he need not have hurried. Mrs. Sylvester was out, he was told by the butler, who proceeded to suggest, with the freedom of an old friend, that he should make his way upstairs and find Miss Eve.

‘Yes, I think I will, Phelps,’ he said, after a moment’s hesitation, ‘if she is disengaged.’

‘Miss Eve is in the music-room playing, I think, sir. Will you go up?’

They found the room empty, however, though an open violin-case on the table and a music-stand, on which leaflets of Schubert fluttered fitfully in the light breeze that entered through the open

window, testified to its recent occupation.

While the butler left Rainham, with apologies, to make further search, the latter stood, hat in hand, making a survey of the little wainscoted room, which he remembered as the school-room. Indeed, though the name, in deference doubtless to Eve's mature age, had been altered, it still retained much of its former aspect. From the little feminine trifles lying about, scraps of unfinished crewel-work and embroidery, and the fresh flowers in the vases, he gathered that it was still an apartment which Eve frequented. He recognised her cage of love-birds hanging in the window; the cottage piano with its frontal of faded silk, on which he could remember her first painful struggles with Czerny and scales; the pictures on the walls, many of them coloured reproductions from the Christmas numbers of the illustrated papers; the ink-stained tablecloth on the round table in the centre.

He examined the photographs on the mantelpiece with a smile—Charles in his wig and gown, and Mrs. Sylvester with her pretty, faded face, gazed at each other, with a curious likeness in their disparity, from a double frame in the centre; the spectacled profile of the eminently respectable woman who had superintended Miss Eve's studies held another place of honour; and, opposite, Rainham recognised a faded photograph of himself, taken six years before in Rome. He turned from these to the bookshelves, which seemed to be filled with relegations from the rest of the house—children's story-books in tarnished bright covers and dilapidated school-books. He took down one of these latter and examined it absently, with a half-sigh. He had it still in his hand when the young girl fluttered in, looking very cool and fresh in her plain white dress, with a broad sash of apple-green ribbon.

‘I thought you were never coming to see us again, Philip,’ she said reproach-

fully, as she held out her little hand to him. 'What possessed them to bring you here? It's awfully untidy.'

'Phelps had an idea you were making music,' he explained; 'and, for the untidiness, I suppose he remembered that I was used to it of old.'

'Yes, it's just the same. It is an untidiness of years, and it is hopeless to cope with it. What *have* you got there?'

He turned the book round to acquaint himself.

'Ollendorf's "Elementary German Grammar,"' he said with a smile; 'it's an interesting work.'

She made a little *moue* expressive of disapproval.

'Ah, how nice it is to have done with all that, Philip! You can't believe how glad I am to be "finished"; yes, I am finished now. I don't even have masters, and Miss Murison has gone away to Brighton and opened a school for young gentlemen. Poor little wretches! how

sorry I am for them ! Do you remember Miss Murison, Philip ?

She had sunk down into an arm-chair, and Rainham stood, his stooping shoulders propped against the mantelpiece, smiling down at her.

‘ Yes, I remember Miss Murison ; and so you are glad her reign has come to an end, Eve ? Well, I suppose it is natural.’

She nodded her pretty head.

‘ Just a little, Philip. But how tired you look ! Will you have some tea ? I suppose you have just come from Black-pool ?’

His face darkened suddenly, and the smile for a moment died away.

‘ No,’ he said shortly, ‘ I have been in the Park.’

‘ Well,’ she remarked after a moment, ‘ you must have some tea, anyhow. Of course you will wait and see mamma ; she has gone to the Dollonds’ “ at home,” you know. I am all alone. If you like, we

will have it in here, as we did in the old days—a regular schoolroom tea.'

'It will be charming,' said Rainham, seating himself; 'it will only want the Murison to complete the illusion.'

'Oh, it will do just as well without her,' said Eve, laughing; 'ring the bell, please.'

Rainham sat back watching her with far-away eyes, as she moved lightly about, giving her orders with a childish imperiousness, and setting out the little tea-table between them.

'It is delightful,' he said again, when they were once more alone and he had accepted a well-creamed cup and a wafer-like *tartine*; 'and I feel as if I had turned back several years. But how is it, by-the-by, that you have not gone to the Dolonds' ?'

She laughed up at him merrily.

'Because I have had much more important things to do. I have been with my dressmaker. I am going to a dance

to-night, and I have had a great deal of bother over my new frock. But it is all right now, and I shall wear it to-night; and it is perfectly sweet. Oh, you have never seen me at a party yet, Philip!

‘Never? My dear child, I have danced with you at scores.’

‘Oh yes, at children’s parties; but never since I have grown up—“come out,” I mean. Oh, Philip, is there anything in life so delightful as one’s first ball? I wish you would come out with us sometimes. I should like to dance with you again now.’

‘Ah,’ he said, ‘my dancing days are over. I am a wallflower, Eve, now; and my only use at balls is to fetch and carry for the chaperons.’

‘Philip!’ she cried reproachfully, ‘what a dreadful thing to say! Besides, you used to dance so splendidly.’

‘Did I?’ he asked; ‘I expect you would be less lenient now. Yes, I will have another cup, please.’

She filled it, and he took it from her in silence, wondering how he could least obtrusively gain the knowledge of her mind he sought. He had said to himself that if he could find her alone, it would be so easy ; just a word, an accent, would tell him how far she really cared. But now that she was actually with him, it had become strangely difficult. Very sadly he reflected that she had grown out of his knowledge ; away from her, she rested in his memory as a child whom he could help. The actual presence of this young girl with the deep eyes, in the first flush of her womanhood, corrected him ; an intolerable weight sealed his tongue, forbidding him to utter Lightmark's name, greatly as he desired. He racked himself for delicate circumlocutions, and it was only at last, by a gigantic effort, when he realized that the afternoon waned, while he wasted a unique occasion in humorous commonplace, that he broke almost brutally into Eve's disquisitions on her various festivities

to ask, blushing like a girl, if Lightmark's picture progressed.

'I have had only a few sittings,' she admitted, 'and I expect they will be the last here. Perhaps they will be continued abroad. You know, Mr. Lightmark is going to meet us in Switzerland, perhaps.'

'You will like that?' suggested Rainham gravely.

She looked into her cup, beating a tattoo on the carpet with her little foot nervously.

'Yes,' she said, after a minute, 'I think so.'

There was nothing in her words, her tone, to colour this bare statement of a simple fact. Only a second later, as if in a sudden need of confidence, a resumption of her old childish habit towards him, she raised her eyes to his, and in their clear, gray depths, before they drooped again beneath the long lashes, he read her secret. No words could have told him more plainly that she loved Lightmark—that Dick had merely to speak. Their silence only lasted

a moment ; but it seemed to Rainham, who had not shifted his position or moved a muscle, that it stretched over an interminable space of time. It was curiously intangible, and yet even then he realized that it would remain with its least accessories in his mind one of those trivial, indelible photographs which last a lifetime. The smell of mignonette that spread in from the window-box through the turquoise-blue Venetian blinds ; the chattering of the love-birds ; the strains of a waltz of Waldteufel's floating up from a German band in the street below—they ran into a single sensation that was like the stab of cold steel. He sat staring blankly at the tattered bookshelves, playing mechanically with his teaspoon ; and presently he became aware that the young girl was talking, was telling him the route they should take next week, and the name of the hotel they were going to at Basel.

‘ Yes,’ he hazarded, and ‘ Yes,’ and ‘ Yes,’ his smiling lips belying the lassitude of his

eyes. Actually, he looked out and beyond her, at another Eve, to whom he now paid his adieux. It was the dainty little figure of her childish self which he saw, with its bright long hair, and its confiding eyes, and its caressing little ways, in the deepening shadows between the bookshelves—and for the last time. It vanished like a shadow, smiling mockingly, and he knew it would never return. In its place abode henceforth the image of this stately maiden, comely and desirable, with the profound eyes which lighted up—for Dick. An unaccountable sense of failure stole over Rainham—unaccountable because he could lay his finger upon no tangible cause of his discomfiture.

CHAPTER XI.

THE little town was brilliant with September sunshine ; the blue smoke spired almost unbroken into the bluer vault above, and the cream-coloured façades of the houses, with their faded blue shutters and verandas, the gay striped awnings of the little fleet of rowing boats, the gray of the stone parapet, and the dull green of the mountainous opposite shore, were mirrored steeply in the bight of narrowing sunlit lake. The wide dusty esplanade was almost empty, except at the corners, where voluble market-women gossiped over their fruit-baskets, heaped with purple-brown figs, little mountain - born strawberries, sweet, watery grapes, green almonds, and

stupendous pears. At rare intervals a steamboat, bright and neat as a new toy, trailed a long feather of smoke from the foot of the Rigi, shed a small and dusty crowd into the sleepy town, and then bustled back, shearing the silken flood and strangely distorting its reflections.

‘The worst of Lucerne,’ said Mrs. Sylvester—‘the worst of Lucerne is that one can’t escape from Mount Pilatus and the Lion. The inhabitants all think that Pilatus regulates the weather, and they would certainly give their Lion the preference over the Venus of Milo.’

They were all sitting on the terrace in front of the Schweitzerhof; Lady Garnett and Mary, Mrs. Sylvester and Eve. Lady Garnett and her companion were but newly arrived, and, as birds of passage, preferred the hotel to a *pension*. The Sylvesters had been staying in the quaint, rambling town for nearly a fortnight. It was their usual summer resort, and although the spring of each year found

them deciding to go elsewhere for a change, in the end they nearly always proved faithful to the familiar lake. Their *pension*—they regarded it almost as a country house—was such an inducement! The Pension Bungay was maintained by an old servant of the family, who, when he began to find the duties of butler too exacting for his declining years, gave a warning, which applied also to one of his fellow-servants, the cook, to wit, a lady of Continental origin, who had consented to become Madame Bungay; and the pair, having souls above public-houses, and relying on their not inconsiderable connection among the servants of Mayfair, had boldly and successfully launched into an independent career as sole proprietors and managers of the Pension Bungay, Lucerne.

‘Yes,’ said Lady Garnett sympathetically; ‘I suppose Pilatus *is* rather monotonous. It’s rather too near, I think. It ought to be far away, and covered with

snow, more like the Jungfrau, which we have been worshipping at Interlaken—where, by the way, there are positively more Americans than natives.'

'Oh,' Mrs. Sylvester chimed in, 'isn't it dreadful the way they overrun Europe nowadays! There are two American families staying at our *pension*, and you see them everywhere.'

'I think I rather like them. They amuse me, you know, and somehow, though it may be disloyal for me, as a naturalized Englishwoman, to say so, as a rule they comport themselves much better than the ordinary British tourist. Of course, the country is not so accessible for the Americans; it's out of the reach of their cheap excursionists. But how opportune that curious tower is, and the bridge! of course, it's correct to admire them?'

Mary Masters and Eve, who had been quietly discussing *chiffons*, got up from their chairs with a preconcerted air.

‘We are so tired of sitting still,’ said the former, balancing herself with an air of indecision, and giving Mrs. Sylvester time to note the admirable taste of her simple maize-coloured travelling dress, which did not suffer from contrast with the younger girl’s brighter and more elaborately charming toilette. ‘Miss Sylvester wants to show me the uncatchable trout in the lake, and I want to go and see if the salon is empty, so that I can try the piano; and we can’t decide which to do. I suppose, Mrs. Sylvester, that the hotel is more within the bounds of propriety?’

‘Oh, well,’ said Eve, laughing, ‘I don’t care; anyhow, let’s go and find the piano. Only, there is sure to be someone there already.’

‘By the way,’ said Lady Garnett, when the girls had vanished into the building, ‘of course you know that Philip Rainham’s friend—the young man who paints and has a moustache, I mean—is here, or will

be very shortly? He was staying at our hotel at Berne.'

'Mr. Lightmark, I suppose?' answered the other, without showing her surprise except in her eyes. 'We told him that we were coming to Lucerne, and it was more or less arranged.'

'Ah, yes,' interposed Lady Garnett; 'am I indiscreet in suggesting an exceptional attraction?'

Mrs. Sylvester merely looked mysterious, and Lady Garnett was encouraged to continue:

'Your daughter is very beautiful. This Mr. Lightmark has been painting her portrait, *n'est ce pas?* I should think it ought to be a success. Am I to congratulate him?'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Sylvester hurriedly, 'dear Lady Garnett, it hasn't gone so far as that.'

'The portrait?' murmured the other innocently. 'Ah, I'm afraid you misunderstood me.'

Mrs. Sylvester cast a meaning glance in the direction of Eve, who, sauntering along the terrace with Mary, was now behind their seat, and the conversation, which promised to become interesting, dropped, while Mary explained that they had found the music-stool occupied by a lady, who was superfluously protesting her inability to sing 'the old songs'—the person who always *did* monopolize hotel pianos, as Mary laughingly asserted.

Two days later Lightmark presented himself at the Pension Bungay. He had come to Lucerne with the fixed purpose of definitely proposing marriage to Eve. He was far too worldly-wise to fail to perceive that, so far at least, Mrs. Sylvester had certainly taken no trouble to discourage his pretensions. His attentions, he argued, had been by no means obscure; his studio had been singularly honoured by the presence of Miss Sylvester and her mother, for the purposes of the portrait; he had even been granted a sitting at the

house in Park Street, when a less rigid supervision had been exercised, and when, in the absence of the mother, he had been able to assure himself that the girl was far from despising his adoration. Before leaving town he had dined with his uncle, the Colonel, at his club, and the veteran had spontaneously and strenuously urged the step, and even thrown out promising hints as to settlements. He broke in upon the little circle at the hour of afternoon tea, and Eve found his gray travelling suit and the bronze of his complexion exceedingly becoming. He announced that he had come to stay for a week or two; he was going to make some sketches, and he couldn't tear himself away from that delightful bridge and his lodgings!

'My dear fellow,' he said to Charles Sylvester, with an air of familiarity which gave one an insight as to the advance the artist had made in his relations with the family, 'you must come and see my diggings. The most delightful old hos-

telry in Europe. Built straight up out of the lake, like the Castle of Chillon. It's called the *Gasthof zum Pfistern*. I could fish out of my bedroom window. I assure you, it's charming. You must come and dine with me there. I hope you ladies will so far honour me?'

This project, however, fell through, and by way of compensation Lightmark and Charles enjoyed the privilege of entertaining the party, including Lady Garnett and Miss Masters, at Borghoni's; after which the younger people chartered a boat, and floated idly about the star-reflecting lake, while the dowagers maintained a discreet surveillance from their seat on the esplanade.

Of this last incident it may be said that Lightmark and Eve found it altogether delightful, the latter especially being struck by the romance of the situation; while Charles was inclined to be ponderously sentimental, and Miss Masters afterwards confessed to having felt bored.

In the course of the next day Lightmark had the privilege of a confidential interview with the mother of his adored. Mrs. Sylvester had fully armed herself for the occasion, and presented an edifying example of matronly affection and prudence.

‘Of course, I was not altogether unprepared for this, Mr. Lightmark. In fact, I may as well own that I have talked it over with my son, and we agreed that the whole question resolved itself into—ah—into settlements. You must not think me mercenary.’ This was said with a dignified calm, which made the idea preposterous. ‘If you can’—here she seemed to refer to some mental note-book—‘ah—satisfy Charles on that point, I am sure that it will give me great pleasure to regard you as a prospective son-in-law. Of course, you know, I can’t answer for Eve, or Charles.’

‘Ah, my dear lady,’ said the other, gracefully overwhelmed, ‘if I may count

on your good offices I am very fortunate.'

That evening, as the two men sat discussing their cigars and coffee, Lightmark listened with wonderful patience to a disquisition on the subject of—he couldn't afterwards remember whether it was Strikes or the Sugar Bounty. He was rather afraid of the necessary interview with Charles. It would require some tact, and he was prepared to find him unpleasantly exacting as arbiter of his pecuniary status.

'You ought to be in the House, by Jove! that's your line, Sylvester, with a clever wife, you know, to do the canvassing for you'—'and write your speeches,' he mentally added.

The other owned that he had thought of it.

'But the wife,' he added, with an attempt at levity, 'that's the difficulty!'

And the connection of a subsequent remark with this topic, though some con-

versation intervened, did not escape his astute companion, and he was careful to sing Miss Masters' praises with an absence of allusiveness which showed the actor. Then he threw away the stump of his cigar and mentally braced himself.

'You have seen a good deal of me lately,' he said. 'I want to ask you if you have any objection to me as a possible brother-in-law; in fact, I want to marry your sister.'

'Yes?' said the other encouragingly.

'I have, as you may know, spoken to Mrs. Sylvester about it, and I believe she will—that is to say, I think she has no personal objection to me.'

'Oh, of course, my dear fellow, my mother and I are flattered, quite flattered; but you will understand our anxiety that Eve should run no risk of sacrificing any of the advantages she has enjoyed hitherto. May I ask, er——'

'What is my income from all sources?' suggested Lightmark rather flippantly.

‘Well, I have to confess that my profession, in which I am said to be rising, brings me in about four hundred and fifty a year, in addition to which I have a private income, which amounts to, say, three hundred; total, seven hundred and fifty.’ Then, seeing that Charles looked grave, he played his trump card: ‘And I ought to add that my uncle, the Colonel, you know, has been good enough to talk about making me an allowance, on my marrying with his approval. In fact he is, I believe, prepared to make a settlement on my marriage with your sister.’

Charles Sylvester pronounced himself provisionally satisfied, and it was arranged that he should communicate with Colonel Lightmark, and that meanwhile the engagement should not be made public.

Eve was standing on the little balcony appertaining to the sitting-room which had been dedicated to the ladies as a special mark of favour by the proprietor of the *pension*, and Lightmark hastened to join

her there ; and while Charles and his mother played a long game of chess, the two looked out at the line of moonlit Alps, and were sentimentally and absurdly happy.

‘ Mrs. Sylvester,’ said Lightmark, when that lady thought it advisable to warn her daughter that there was a cold wind blowing off the lake, ‘ we have arranged that a certain portrait shall figure in the Academy catalogue next spring as “ Portrait of the Artist’s Wife.” ’

After which Mrs. Sylvester began to call him Richard, and Charles became oppressively genial ; a development which led the embarrassed recipient of these honours to console himself by reflecting that, after all, he was not going to marry the entire family.

‘ *Ma chérie*,’ said Lady Garnett, as the Paris train steamed out of Lucerne on the afternoon of the next day but one, ‘ do you know that I feel a sensation of positive relief at getting away from those

people? Eve is very *gentille*, but lovers are *so* uninteresting, when they are properly engaged: and the excellent Charles! My child, I am afraid you have been very cruel.'

'Cruel, aunt?' said Mary, with a demure look of astonishment. 'I like Eve very much, and I suppose Mr. Lightmark must be nice, because he's such a friend of Philip's. But I don't quite like the way he talks about Philip, and . . . he's very clever.'

'Yes,' said the old lady drowsily; 'he's cleverer than Philip.'

'He may be cleverer, but——' Mary began with some warmth, and paused.

Her companion opened her eyes widely, and darted a keen glance at the girl. Then, settling herself into her corner:

'My dear child, to whom do you say it?'

It was eminently characteristic of Lady Garnett that, even when she was sleepy, she understood what people were going to

say long before the words were spoken, and, especially with her familiars, she had a habit of taking her anticipations as realized.

Mary found something embarrassing in the humour of the old lady's expression, and devoted herself to gazing out of the window at the mountain-bound landscape, in which houses, trees, and cattle all seemed to be in miniature, until the sound of regular breathing assured her that the inquisitive eyes were closed.

CHAPTER XII.

DURING the long, hot August, which variously dispersed the rest of their acquaintances, the intimacy of that ill-assorted couple, the bird of passage Rainham, and Oswyn the artist, was able to ripen. They met occasionally at Brodowski's, of which dingy restaurant they had now almost a monopoly ; for its artistic session had been prorogued, and the 'boys' were scattered, departing one by one, as their purses and inclinations prompted, to resume acquaintance with their favourite 'bits' in Cornwall, or among the orchards and moors of Brittany; to study mountains in sad Merioneth, or to paint ocean rollers and Irish peasants in

ultimate Galway. On the occasion of their second meeting, Rainham having (a trifle diffidently, for the painter was not a questionable man) evinced a curiosity as to his summer movements, Oswyn had scornfully repudiated such a notion.

‘Thank God!’ he cried, ‘I have outworn that mania of searching for prettiness. London is big enough for me. My work is here, and the studies I want are here, and here I stay till the end of all things. I hate the tame country faces, the aggressive stillness and the silent noise, the sentiment and the sheep of it. Give me the streets and the yellow gas, the roar of the City, smoke, haggard faces, flaming omnibuses, parched London, and the river rolling oilily by the embankment like Styx at night when the lamps shine.’

He drew in a breath thirstily, as though the picture were growing on canvas before him.

‘Well, if you want river subjects you must come and find them at Blackpool,’

said Rainham ; and Oswyn had replied abruptly that he would.

And he kept his word, not once but many times, dropping down on Rainham suddenly, unexplainedly, after his fashion, as it were from the clouds, in the late afternoon, when the clerks had left. He would chat there for an hour or two in his spasmodic, half-sullen way, in which, however, an increasing cordiality mingled, making, before he retired once more into space, some colour notes of the yard or the river, or at times a rough sketch, which was never without its terse originality.

Rainham began to look forward to these visits with a recurring pleasure. Oswyn's beautiful genius and Oswyn's savage humours fascinated him, and no less his pleasing personal ambiguity. He seemed to be a person without antecedents, as he was certainly without present ties. Except that he painted, and so must have a place to paint in, he might have lodged precariously in a doss-house, or on door-steps,

or under the Adelphi arches with those outcasts of civilization to whom, in personal appearance, one might not deny he bore a certain resemblance. To no one did he reveal his abiding-place, and it was the merest tradition of little authority that a man from Brodonowski's had once been taken to his studio. By no means a perspicuous man, and to be approached perhaps charily; yet Rainham, as his acquaintance progressed, found himself from time to time brought up with a certain surprise, as he discovered, under all his savage cynicism, his overweening devotion to a depressing theory, a very real vein of refinement, of delicate mundane sensibility, revealed perhaps in a chance phrase or diffidence, or more often in some curiously fine touch to canvas of his rare, audacious brush. The incongruities of the man, his malice, his coarseness, his reckless generosity, gave Rainham much food for thought. And, indeed, that parched empty August seemed full of problematical

issues ; and he had, on matters of more import than the enigmatic mind of a new friend, to be content at last to be tossed to and fro on the winds of vain conjecture.

Lightmark and the Sylvesters occupied him much ; but beyond a brief note from Mrs. Sylvester in Lucerne, which told him nothing that he would know, there came to him no news from Switzerland. In the matter of the girl whom he had befriended—recklessly he told himself at times—difficulties multiplied. A sort of dumb devil seemed to have entered into her, and, with the best will in the world, it was a merely pecuniary assistance which he could give her, half angry with himself the while that his indolent good nature (it appeared to him little else) forbad him to cast back at her what seemed a curious ingratitude almost passing the proverbial feminine perversity, and let her go her own way as she would have it. On two occasions, since that chance meeting in the Park, he had called at the lodging in which he had

helped her to install herself; and from the last he had come away with a distinct sense of failure. Something had come between them, an alien influence was in the air, and the mystery which surrounded the girl, he saw with disappointment, she would not of her own accord assist to dissipate. And yet there was nothing offensive in her attitude, only it had changed, lacked frankness.

One afternoon, finding that he could leave the dock early, he made another effort. He stopped before one in a dingy row of small houses, uniformly depressing, in a street that ran into the Commercial Road, and rang the bell, which tinkled aggressively. A slatternly woman, with a bandage round her head and an air of drunken servility, responded to his inquiry for 'Mrs. Crichton' by ushering him into a small back parlour, in which a pale girl in black sat with her head bent over a typewriter. She rose, as he came in, a little nervously, and stood, her thin hands

clasped in front of her, looking up at him with expectant, terrified eyes.

‘I am sorry to alarm you,’ he said stiffly. ‘I came to see if I could do nothing for you, and to tell you once more that I can do nothing for you unless you are open with me, unless you help me.’

The woman looked away to where the child sat, in a corner of the small room, playing with some disused cotton reels.

‘You are very kind, sir,’ she said in a low, uneasy voice; ‘but I want nothing; we want very little, the child and I; and with what your kindness in getting me the machine helps us to, we have enough.’

‘You don’t want to be reinstated, to get back your lover, to have your child acknowledged?’

The girl flushed; her hands, which were still locked together, trembled a little.

‘I don’t want for nothing, sir, except to be left alone.’

Then she added, looking him straight in the face now, with a certain rude dignity :

‘I wouldn’t seem ungrateful, sir, for your great kindness. I think you are the best man I ever met. Oh, believe me, I am not ungrateful, sir ! But it is no good, not a scrap, though once I thought it. We must get along as we can now, the child and I—shame and all.’

She sighed, gazed intently for a silent minute at the keys of the elaborate machine before her, and then continued, speaking very slowly, as if she were afraid of drawing too largely on her newly-found candour :

‘Why should I keep it from you ? It makes me feel a liar every time I see you. I will be quite plain with you, sir ; perhaps the truth’s best, though it’s hard enough. I’ve seen him ; that’s why I couldn’t tell you any more. And it’s all over and done, and God help us ! We must make the best of it. You see, sir, he is married,’ said the girl, with a sharp intonation in her voice like a sob.

Rainham had sunk into a chair wearily ;

he looked up at her now, drawing a long breath, which, for some reason he could not analyze, was replete with relief.

‘Married?’ he ejaculated; ‘are you sure?’

‘Sure enough,’ said Kitty Crichton. ‘He told me so.’

‘Do you care for this fellow?’ he asked curiously after awhile.

The flush on her face had faded into two hectic spots on either cheek; there was a lack of all animation in her voice, whether of hope or indignation; she had the air of a person who gave up, who was terribly tired of things.

‘Care?’ she echoed. ‘I don’t rightly know, sir; I think it’s all dead together—love and anger, and my good looks and all. I care for the child, and I don’t want to harry or hunt him down for the sake of what has been—that’s all.’

He regarded her with the same disinterested pity which had seized him when he saw her first. There were only ruins

of a beauty that must have once been striking. As he watched her a doubt assailed him, whether, after all, he had not been deceived by a bare resemblance ; whether, in effect, she had ever been actually identical with that brilliant Pierrette whose likeness had so amazed him in Lightmark's rooms.

‘By the way,’ he asked suddenly, ‘you told me you have been a model : did—was this man a painter ? Has he ever painted you ?’

The girl fell back a step or two irresolutely.

‘Ah ! why do you trouble so ? What does it matter ?’ Then she added faintly, but hurriedly stumbling over her words : ‘He wasn’t a painter—only for amusement ; he didn’t exhibit. He was a newspaper writer. But he couldn’t get work, and got a place in a foreign-going steamer, to keep accounts, I think. That was afterwards, and that’s why I looked for him at your dock. They told me the

ship had been there, but it wasn't true. Ah ! let me be, sir, let me be !'

She broke off hastily, clasping her hands across her breast.

The story, though incoherent, was possible ; Rainham could see no motive for her deceiving him, and yet he believed she was lying. He merely shrugged his shoulders, with a rising lassitude. He seemed to have been infected by her own dreariness, to labour under a disability of doing or saying any more ; he, too, gave it up. He wanted to get away out of the dingy room ; its rickety table and chairs, its two vulgar vases on the stained mantel, its gross upholstery, seemed too trenchantly sordid in the strong August sun. The child's golden head—she was growing intelligent now, and strong on her legs—was the one bright spot in the room. He stopped to pat it with a great pity, a sense of too much pathos in things flooding him, before he passed out again into the mean street.

CHAPTER XIII.

SEPTEMBER set in cold, with rain and east winds, and Rainham, a naturally chilly mortal, as he handed his coat to Lady Garnett's butler, and followed him into the little library, where dinner was laid for three, congratulated himself that a seasonable fire crackled on the large hearth.

‘I hardly expected you back yet,’ he remarked, after the first greetings, stretching out his hands to the blaze; ‘and your note was a welcome surprise. I almost think we are the only people in town.’

Lady Garnett shrugged her shoulders with a gesture of rich tolerance, as one who acknowledged the respectability of all tastes, whilst preferring her own.

‘London has its charm, to me,’ she remarked. ‘We are glad to be back. I am getting too old to travel—that terrible crossing, and the terrible people one meets!’

Rainham smiled with absent sympathy, looking into the red coals.

‘You must remember, I don’t know where you have been. Tell me your adventures and your news.’

‘I leave that to Mary, my dear,’ said the old lady.

And at that moment the girl came in, looking stately and older than her age in one of the dark, high-cut dresses which she affected. She shook hands with Rainham, smiling; and as they went to table he repeated his question.

‘It is difficult,’ she said: ‘we seem to have been everywhere, Oh, we have been very restless this year, Philip. I think we were generally in the train. We tried Trouville——’

‘Detestable!’ put in Lady Garnett with

genial petulance ; 'it was too small. Half the world was crowded into it ; and it was precisely the half-world——'

'I can imagine it,' interrupted Rainham, with his grave smile ; 'and then ?'

'Then we thought of Switzerland,' continued the young girl. 'We went to Geneva. We were almost dead when we arrived, because we had to go a very roundabout way to avoid Paris ; we could not go to Paris, because we were afraid of seeing the Republic. It was very hot in Geneva. No place ever was so hot before. We lay on the sofa for three days, and then we were strong enough to run away.'

'It was purgatorial !' said the elder lady ; 'it was full of English governesses and Swiss pastors.'

'Then we went to look for cool places, and we had a charming week at Inter-laken, and looked longingly at the Jung-frau, and contemplated the ascent.'

Lady Garnett laughed her quaint little laugh.

‘Interlaken might have sufficed, my dear ; but, unfortunately—it was one of Mary’s ridiculous economies—we went to a *pension* ; and we fell into the hands of an extraordinary woman with a fringe and a Bible, a native of North America, who endeavoured to persuade me that I was a Jewess.’

‘No, no !’ laughed Mary, ‘not quite so bad as that. It was one of the other tribes she would have us belong to—one of the lost tribes. It was not personal.’

‘Ah, *Dieu merci* ! if they are lost,’ ejaculated her aunt ; ‘but you are wrong ; it was most personal, Mary.’

‘I will do her the justice to add that she only suggested it once,’ continued the girl, with a smile of elision. ‘However, we had to flee from her ; and so we came to Lucerne.’

‘That was worst of all,’ said Lady Garnett, arching her delicate eyebrows ; ‘it was full of lovers.’

The solemn butler had placed a pair of

obdurate birds before Rainham, which engrossed him : presently he looked up, remarking quietly :

‘ Did you see the Sylvesters ? ’

‘ Ah yes ! we saw the Sylvesters ; we walked with the Sylvesters ; we drank tea with the Sylvesters ; we made music with the Sylvesters ; we went on the lake with the Sylvesters. That handsome artist—Mr. Lightmark, is it not, Mary ?—was there, making the running with Miss Eve. The marriage seems to be arranged. ’

She shrugged her shoulders ; the precise shade of meaning in the gesture escaped Rainham : he looked over to Mary inquiringly.

‘ They seem very much attached to each other, ’ she remarked.

‘ Oh, they were imbecile ! ’ added Lady Garnett ; ‘ try the Moselle, my dear, and leave that terrible sweet stuff to Mary. Yes, I was glad to come away from Lucerne. Everything is very bad now except my Constant’s *vol-au-vent*, which

you don't seem to have tried ; but lovers are the worst of all. Though I like that young man, Lightmark ; he is a type that interests me ; he seems——'

She looked round the room vaguely, as if the appropriate word might be lurking in some angle of the apartment ; finally, the epithet proving difficult, she abandoned the search.

'*Il ira loin !*' she said tersely ; 'he flatters me discreetly, as they did when I was young, before the Republic.'

The silent, well-trained man handed round caviare and olives ; Mary trifled with some grapes, her brow knitted a little, thoughtfully. Lady Garnett poured herself a glass of maraschino. When they were left alone, the girl remarked abruptly:

'I am not sure whether I quite like Mr. Lightmark ; he does not seem to me sincere.'

Lady Garnett lifted up her hands.

'Why should he be, my dear ? sincerity is very trying. A decent hypocrisy is the

secret of good society. Your good, frank people are very rude. If I am a wicked old woman, it is nobody's business to tell me so but my director's.'

Mary had risen, and had come over to the old lady's side.

'But, then, you are not a wicked old woman, my aunt,' she observed gently.

'Ah!' she threw back, 'how do you judge? Do me the justice to believe, *chérie*, that, if I tell you a good deal, there is a good deal, happily, which I don't tell you.'

She pushed a box of cigarettes, which the man had placed on the table, towards Rainham. He took one and lit it silently, absently, without his accustomed protests; the girl looked up smiling.

'That means that you want your *tête-à-tête*, Aunt Marcelle? I know the signal. Well, I will leave you; I want to try over that new march of Liszt's; and I expect, by the time I have grappled with it, you will be coming up for your coffee.'

‘You are a good girl,’ answered the elder lady, stroking her hand. ‘Yes, run away and make music! When Philip and I have had enough scandal and frivolity, we will come and find you; and you shall play us a little of that strange person Wagner, who fascinates me, though you may not believe it.’

It was a habit of the house, on occasion of these triangular dinner-parties, that Lady Garnett should remain with Rainham in the interval which custom would have made him spend solitary over his wine. It was a habit which Mary sacredly respected, although it often amused her; and she knew it was one which her aunt valued. And, indeed, though the two made no movement, and for awhile said nothing, there was an air of increased intimacy, if it were only in their silence, when the door had closed on the girl and left them together. Presently Lady Garnett began, holding up her little glass of crystal maraschino that vied in the light

of the candelabra with the diamonds on her fingers :

‘I had a conversation with that wearisome young man Charles Sylvester at Lucerne, Philip ; he tried to sound me as to Mary’s prospects and the state of her affections.’

Rainham looked up with quiet surprise.

‘Do you mean to say——?’ he queried.

‘It is very obvious,’ she answered quickly ; ‘I saw it long ago. But don’t imagine that he got much out of me. I was as deep as a well. But what do you think of it?’

‘I hope they will be happy,’ he answered absently. She arched her expressive brows, and he coloured, recollecting himself. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he said hastily ; ‘I confess I was thinking of something else. You were talking of Mary ; why should it not do ? Does she care about him?’

His companion laughed, and her laugh had more than its wonted suggestion of irony.

‘My dear Philip, for a clever man you can be singularly dense! Care for him! of course she does not.’

‘She might do worse,’ he said; ‘Sylvester is not very bright, but he works hard, and will succeed after a fashion. His limitations dovetail conveniently with his capacities. What do you intend to do?’

‘Do I ever interfere in these things? My dear, you are remarkably dull to-night. I never make marriages, nor prevent them. With all my faults, match-making is not one of them. I think too ill of life to try and arrange it. You must admit,’ she added, ‘that, long as I have known you, I have never tried to marry you!’

‘Ah, that would have been too fatuous!’ he remarked lightly.

They were both silent for awhile, regarding each other disinterestedly; they appeared to be following a train of thought which led nowhither; presently Lady Garnett asked:

‘Are you going abroad this year?’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘as soon as I can—about the middle of October; to Mentone or Bordighera, I suppose.’

‘Do you find them interesting? Do they do you much good?’

He smiled rather listlessly, ignoring her second question.

‘I confess,’ he said, ‘it becomes rather a bore. But, I suppose, at my time of life one finds nothing very interesting. The mere act of living becomes rather a bore after a time.’

‘I wonder what you are thinking about, Philip?’ she asked meditatively; ‘something has annoyed you to-night; I wonder if you are going to tell me.’

He laughed.

‘Do we ever tell each other our annoyances? I think we sit and look at each other, and discover them. That is much more appropriate.’

‘You take things too seriously,’ she went on; ‘my dear, they are really not worth it. That is my settled conviction.’

She sat and sipped her liqueur appreciatively, smiling good-humouredly, and Philip could not help regarding her with a certain admiration. [Her small, sharp, subtile face, beneath its mask of smiling indifference, looked positively youthful in the judicious candle-light ; only the little, birdlike, withered hands bore the stigmata of age. And he could not conceive her changing ; to the last, those tell-tale hands apart, she would be comely and cynical, and would die as she had lived, secure 'in the high places of laughter'—a laughter that, for all its geniality, struck him at times as richly sardonic—in the decent drapery of her fictitious youth ; in a decorous piety, yet a little complicated, in the very reception of the last rites, by the amiable arching of her expressive eyebrows.

'You are wonderful,' he exclaimed, after an interval, 'wonderful ; that was what I was thinking.'

She smiled disinterestedly.

'Because you don't understand me ?

My dear, nothing is so easy as mystification ; that is why I don't return the compliment. Yourself, you know—you are not very intelligible to-night.'

He looked away frowning, but without embarrassment ; presently, throwing up his hands with a little mock gesture of despair, he remarked :

'I should be delighted to explain myself, but I can't. I am unintelligible to myself also ; we must give it up, and go and find Mary.'

'Ah no ! let us give it up, by all means ; but we will not join Mary yet ; smoke another cigarette.'

He took one and lit it, absently, in the blue flame of the spirit-lamp, and she watched him closely with her bright, curious eyes.

'You know this Mr. Lightmark very well, don't you, Philip ?'

'Intimately,' he answered, nodding.

'You must be pleased,' she said. 'It is a great match for him, a struggling artist. Can he paint, by the way ?'

‘He has great talent.’ He held his cigarette away from him, considering the ash critically. ‘Yes, he can certainly paint. I suppose it is a good thing—and for Eve, too. Why should it not be?’

‘He is a charming young man’—she spoke judicially — ‘charming! But in effect Mary was quite right; she generally is—he is not sincere.’

‘I think you are wrong,’ said Rainham after a moment. ‘I should be sorry to believe you were not, for the little girl’s sake. And I have known him a long time; he is a good fellow at bottom.’

‘Ah!’ cried Lady Garnett with a little quick gesture of her right hand, ‘that is precisely what he is not. He exaggerates; he must be very secret; no one ever was so frank as he seems to be.’

‘Why are you saying all this to me?’ the other asked after a moment. ‘You know I should be very sorry; but what can I do? it’s arranged.’

‘I think you might have prevented it, if

you had cared ; but, as you say, it is too late now.'

'There was no way possible in which I could have prevented it,' he said slowly, after an interval which seemed to strike them both as ponderous.

'That was an admission I wanted,' she flashed back. 'You *would* have prevented it—you would have given worlds to have prevented it.'

His retort came as quickly, accented by a smile :

'Not a halfpenny. I make no admissions ; and I have not the faintest idea of what you are driving at. I am a pure spectator. To quote yourself, I don't make marriages, nor mar them ; I think too ill of life.'

'Ah no!' she said ; 'it is that you are too indolent ; you disappoint me.'

'It is you, dear lady, who are inconsistent,' he cried, laughing.

'No, you disappoint me,' she resumed ; 'seriously, my dear, I am dissatisfied with

you. You will not assert yourself ; you do nothing ; you have done nothing. There never was a man who made less of his life.'

He protested laughingly :

'I have had no time ; I have been looking after my lungs.'

'Ah, you are incorrigible!' she exclaimed, rising ; 'let us go and find Mary. I give you up ; or, rather, I give myself up, as an adviser. For, after all, you are right—there is nothing worth doing in this bad world except looking after one's lung, or whatever it may be.'

'Perhaps not even that,' said Philip, as he followed her from the room ; 'even that, after a time, becomes monotonous.'

CHAPTER XIV.

IT occurred to Lightmark one evening, as he groped through the gloom of his studio, on his way to bed, after assisting at a very charming social gathering at the Sylvesters', that as soon as he was married he would have to cut Brodonowski's. The reasons he gave himself were plausible enough, and, indeed, he would have found himself the only Benedict among this horde of wild bachelors. The informal circle was of such recent association that, so far, no precedent for matrimony had occurred, and it was more than doubtful how the experiment might be received. In any case, he told himself, he could not be expected to introduce people like Oswyn

and McAllister to his wife—or, rather, to Mrs. Sylvester's daughter. Oswyn was plainly impossible, and McAllister's devotion to tobacco so inordinate that it had come to be a matter of common belief that he smoked short pipes in his sleep.

Then he had dismissed the subject ; the long, pleasant holiday in Switzerland intervened, and it was only on his return, late in the autumn, that the question again presented itself, as he turned from the threshold of the house in Park Street, where he had been dining, and half unconsciously took the familiar short cut towards Turk Street. He paused for a deliberate instant when he had hailed the first passing hansom, and then told the man to drive to Piccadilly Circus.

‘I *must* go there a few times more, if only to break it off gently,’ he reflected, ‘and I want to see old Rainham. It is stupid of me not to have written to him—yes, stupid ! Wonder if he has heard ? I

mustn't give *him* up, at any rate. We'll—we'll ask him to dinner, and all that sort of thing. And what the deuce am I going to send to the Academy? Thank goodness, I have enough Swiss sketches to work up for the other galleries to last me for years. But the Academy——'

Then he lost himself in contemplative enjoyment of the familiar vista of Regent Street, the curved dotted lines of crocus-coloured lamps, fading in the evening fog, the flitting ruby-eyed cabs, and the calm white arc-lights, set irregularly about the circus, dulling the grosser gas. He owned to himself that he had secretly yearned for London; that his satisfaction on leaving the vast city was never so great as his joy on again setting foot upon her pavements.

The atmosphere of the long low room, with its anomalous dark ceiling and grotesquely-decorated walls, was heavily laden with the incense of tobacco and a more subtile odour, which numbered among its

factors whisky and absinthe. The slippered, close-cropped waiter, who, by popular report, could speak five languages, and usually employed a mixture of two or three, was still clearing away the débris of protracted dinners; and a few men sat about, in informal groups, playing dominoes, chatting, or engrossed in their Extra Specials. The fire shone cheerfully beneath the high mantel, and the pleasant lamplight lent a mellow glow, which was vaguely suggestive of Dutch interiors, as it flickered on the dark wooden floor, and glanced from the array of china on the dresser in the corner.

When Lightmark entered, closing the door briskly on the foggy, chill October night, he was greeted warmly and demonstratively. The fraternity which made Brodonowski's its head-quarters generously admired his genius, and, for the most part, frankly envied his good-fortune. The younger men respected him as a man who had seen life; and the narratives with

which he occasionally favoured them produced in such of his hearers feelings very different to those which older men, like Oswyn, expressed by a turn of the eyebrow or a shrug. They were always ready enough to welcome him, to gather round him, and to drink with him; and this, perhaps, expresses the limits of their relation.

‘Lightmark, by Jove!’ cried one of them, waving his pipe in the air, as the new-comer halted in the low doorway, smiling in a rather bewildered manner as he unbuttoned his overcoat. ‘Welcome to the guerilla camp! And a dress suit! These walls haven’t enclosed such a thing since you went away. This is indeed an occasion!’

Lightmark passed from group to group, deftly parrying and returning the chorus of friendly thrusts, and shaking hands with the affability which was so characteristic a feature of his attitude toward them. The man he looked for, the friend whom he

intended to honour with a somewhat tardy confidence of his happiness, was not there. When he asked for Rainham, he was told that 'the dry-docker,' as these flippant youngsters familiarly designated the silent man, whom they secretly revered, had gone for an after-dinner stroll, or perchance to the theatre, with Oswyn.

'With Oswyn?' queried Lightmark, with the shadow of a frown.

'Oh, Oswyn and he are getting very thick!' said Copal. 'They are almost as inseparable as you two used to be. I'm afraid you will find yourself cut out. Three is an awkward number, you know. But when did you come back? When are you going to show us your sketches? And how long did you stay in Paris? . . . You *didn't* stop in Paris? This won't do, you know. I say, Dupuis, here's a man who didn't stop in Paris! Ask him if he wants to insult you.'

'Ah, mon cher!' expostulated the Frenchman, looking up from his game of domi-

noes, 'I would not stop in London if I could help it.'

'Oh, shut up, Copal!' said Lightmark good-humouredly. 'I was with ladies—Dupuis will sympathize with me there, eh, *mon vieux*?—and they wanted to stay at Lucerne until the last minute. So we came straight through.'

'Then you haven't seen Sarah in "Cleopatra," and we were relying on you for an unvarnished account. Ladies, too! See here, my boy, you won't get any good out of touring about the Continent with ladies. Hang it all! I believe it'll come true, after all!'

'Very likely—what?'

'Oh, well, they said—I didn't believe it, but they said that you were going to desert the camp, and prance about with corpulent R.A.'s in Hanover Square.'

'And so would we all, if we got the chance,' said McAllister cynically.

And after the general outcry which followed this suggestion, the conversa-

tion drifted back to the old discussion of the autumn shows, the pastels at the Grosvenor, and the most recent additions to the National Gallery.

When at last Rainham came into the room, following, with his habitual half-timid air, the shambling figure of the painter Oswyn, it struck Lightmark that he had grown older, and that he had, as it were, assimilated some of the intimate disreputability of the place: it would no longer have been possible to single him out as a foreign unit in the circle, or to detect in his mental attitude any of the curiosity of the casual seeker after new impressions, the Philistine in Bohemia. There was nothing but pleasure in the slight manifestation of surprise which preceded his frank greeting of Lightmark, a greeting thoroughly English in its matter-of-fact want of demonstrativeness, and the avoidance of anything likely to attract the attention of others.

Oswyn seemed less at his ease: there

was an extra dash of nervous brusqueness in the sarcastic welcome which he offered to the new-comer ; and although there was a vacant seat in the little circle of which Copal and Lightmark formed the nucleus, and to which Rainham had joined himself, he shuffled off to his favourite corner, and buried himself in ' Gil Blas ' and an abnormally thick cloud of tobacco-smoke.

Rainham gazed after him for a moment or two with a puzzled expression.

' Amiable as ever ! ' said Lightmark, with a laugh. ' Poor old beggar ! Have a cigarette ? You ought to give up pipes. Haven't you been told that cigarettes are—what is it ?—" the perfect type—" ? '

' Oh, chestnuts ! ' interposed Copal, ' that's at least six months old. And it's rot, too ! Do you know what McAllister calls them ? Spittle and tissue. Brutal, but expressive. But I say, old man, won't Mrs. Thingumy drop on you for smoking in your dress-coat ? Or—or—— No, break it to me gently. You don't mean to say that you

possess *two*? I really feel proud of having my studio next door to you.'

'Copal is becoming quite a humorist,' Lightmark suggested in an impartial manner. 'What a wag it is! Keep it up, my boy. By the way, Mrs. Grumbit has been talking about your "goings on," as she calls them: she's apparently very much exercised in her mind as to the state of your morals. She told me she had to take you in with the matutinal milk three times last week. She wants me to talk to you like a father. It won't do, you know.'

'I should like to hear you, Dick,' said Rainham lazily. 'Fire away! But who is Mrs. Grumbit?'

'Oh, she's our housekeeper—the lady who dusts the studio, you know, and gives the models tea and good advice. She's very particular as to the models: she won't let us paint from any who don't come up to her standard of propriety. And the worst of it is that the properest

girls are always the ugliest. I don't know——'

'Before you proceed with this highly original disquisition,' interrupted Copal, 'I think you ought to be warned that we have recently formed a Society for the Protection of Reputations, models and actresses' in particular. It was McAllister's idea. You now have the honour of being in the headquarters—the committee-room—of the society, and anything like slander, or even truth, will be made an example of.'

'Don't you find it rather difficult to spread your sheltering wings over what doesn't exist?' hazarded Lightmark amusedly.

'Ah, I knew you would say that! You see, that's just where we come in. We talk about their morals and reputations until they begin to imagine they have some, and they unconsciously get induced to live up to them. See? It's rather mixed, but it works beautifully. Ask the

vice-president! Rainham holds that proud office. I may remark that I am treasurer, and the subscription is half a guinea, which goes towards the expenses of providing light refreshments for the—the beneficiaries.'

'This is really very interesting! Rainham vice-president, too! I thought he looked rather—rather worn by the cares of the office. You must make me a member at once. But who's president?'

'President? Who *is* president, McAlister? I really forget. You see, whenever the president is caught speaking too candidly of any of our clients' characters, we pass a vote of censure, and depose him, and he has to stand drinks. The competition isn't so keen as it used to be. If you would like to stand—for the office, I mean—I dare say there will be an opening soon. . . . Well, I must be off: I'm afraid of Mrs. Grumbit, and—yes, by Jove!—I've forgotten my latchkey again! Of course you're not coming yet, Dick?

Come and breakfast with me to-morrow.
Good-night, you fellows !

‘Copal has been in great form to-night,’ said Lightmark, after the door had closed on him, getting up and stretching himself. ‘What does it mean ? Joy at my return ? Fatted calf ?’

‘No doubt, my boy, no doubt,’ growled McAllister humorously, on his way to the door. ‘But you must bear in mind, too, the circumstance that the laddie’s just sold a picture.’

‘Good business !’ ejaculated Lightmark, as he reflected to himself that perhaps that despaired-of fiver would be repaid after all.

About midnight most of the men left. Rainham remained, and Lightmark, who professed himself too lazy to move. Rainham lapsed into his familiar state of half-abstraction, while his friend cross-examined a young sculptor fresh from Rome.

At the next table Oswyn was holding forth, with eager gesticulations and the

excitement of the hour in his eyes, on the subject of a picture which he contemplated painting in oils for exhibition at the Salon next year. Rainham had heard it all before ; still, he listened with a keen appreciation of the wonderful touch with which the little dishevelled artist enlarged on the capabilities of his choice, the possibilities of colour and treatment. The picture was to be painted at the dock, and the painter had already achieved a daringly suggestive impression in pastels of the familiar night-scene which he now described : the streaming, vivid torches, their rays struggling and drowning in the murky water, glimmering faintly in the windows of the black warehouse barely suggested at the side ; the alert, swarming sailors, busy with ropes and tackle ; and in the middle the dark, steep leviathan, fresh from the sea-storms, growing, as it were, out of the impenetrable chaos of the foggy background, in which the river-lights gleamed like opals set in dull ebony.

When the tide of inspiration failed the speaker, as it soon did, Lightmark continued to look at him askance, with an air of absent consideration turning to uneasiness. There was a general silence, broken only by the occasional striking of a match and the knocking of a pipe against a boot-heel. Soon the young sculptor discovered that he had missed his last train, and fled incontinently. Oswyn settled himself back in his chair, as one who has no regard for time, and rolled a cigarette, the animation with which he had spoken now only perceptible in the points of colour in either cheek. Rainham and Lightmark left him a few minutes later, the last of the revelers, drawing the cat with the charred end of a match on the back of an envelope, and too deeply engrossed to notice their departure.

The fog had vanished, and the moon shone softly, through a white wreath of clouds, over the straggling line of house-tops. The narrow, squalid little street was

deserted, and the sound of wheels in the busier thoroughfare at the end was very intermittent.

Lightmark buttoned his gloves deliberately, and drew a long breath of the night air before he broke the silence.

‘It’s on occasions like this that I wish Bloomsbury and Kensington lay in the same direction—from here, you know; we should save a fortune in cab-fares. . . . But—but that wasn’t what I wanted to say. Philip, my dear fellow, congratulate me.’

He paused for a minute looking at the other curiously, with something of a melodramatic pose. Rainham had his face turned rather away, and was gazing at the pale reflection of the moonlight in one of the opposite windows.

‘I know,’ he said simply. ‘I *do* congratulate you—from the bottom of my heart. And I hope you will make her happy.’ Then he turned and looked Lightmark in the face. ‘I suppose you *do* love her, Dick?’

‘I suppose I do. But how the deuce did you know anything about it? I have been blaming myself, needlessly it appears, for not letting you hear of it. Has it—has it been in the papers?’

Rainham laughed in spite of himself.

‘Approaching marriage of a celebrated artist? No, Dick, I don’t think it has. Lady Garnett told me more than a week ago.’

‘Oh,’ said Dick blankly. ‘I—I’m much obliged to her. I thought perhaps it was the Colonel; I wrote to him, you know, and I thought he was a discreet old bird. But how did Lady Garnett know?’

‘She seemed to think it was no secret,’ said Rainham, with a suggestion of apology in his tone; ‘and, of course, she knows that I am——’

‘My best friend,’ interposed the other impulsively. ‘So you are. And I ought to have told you; I was a brute. And I feel like the devil about it. . . . Well, it can’t be helped! Will you have this cab, or shall I?’

Rainham drew back with a gesture of abnegation as the driver reined the horse back upon its haunches with a clatter.

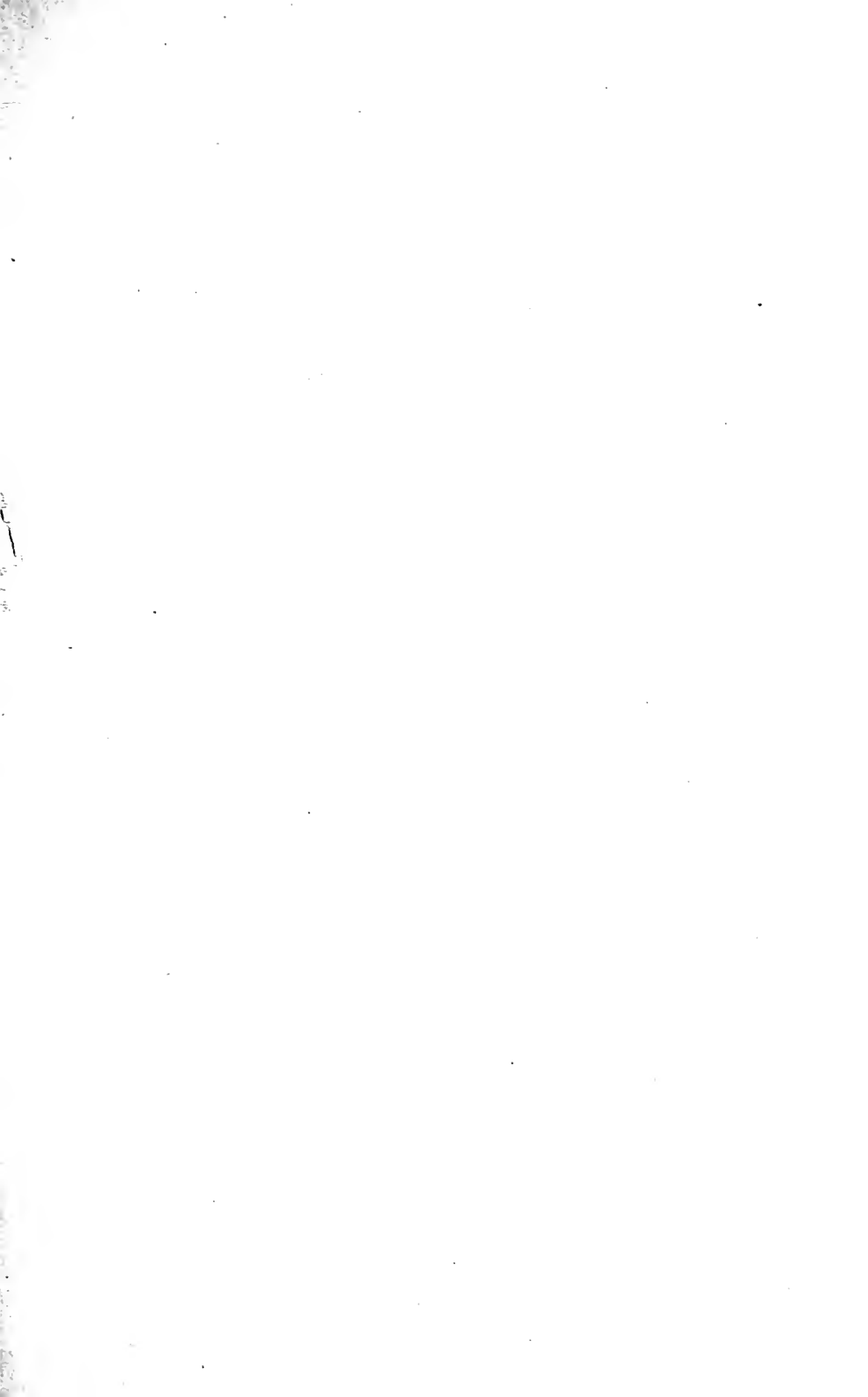
‘I’m going to walk, I think. Only up to Bloomsbury, you know. Good-night, Dick. I hope you’ll be very happy, both of you.’

When the cab drove off, Rainham stood still for a minute and watched it out of sight. Then he started and seemed to pull himself together.

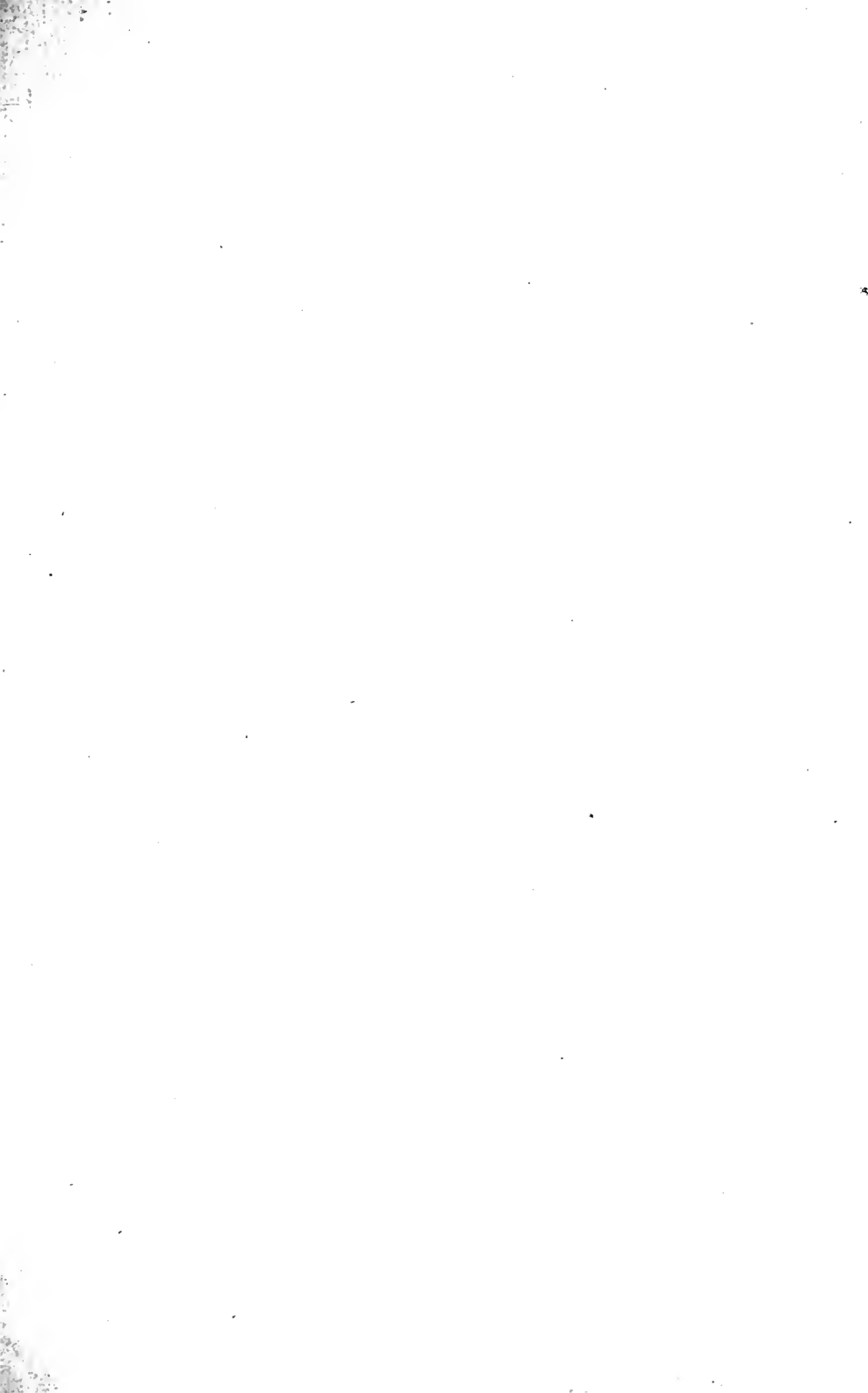
‘I wish I knew!’ he said aloud to himself, as he stepped rapidly towards the East. ‘Well, we’ll be off to Bordighera now, *mon vieux*. We’ve lost Dick, I think, and we’ve lost——’

The soliloquy died away in a sigh and a pathetic shrug.

END OF VOL. I.







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